

I. BEFORE THE COMBINATION LAWS (1791 - 1799).

- 1791. The spirit of combination in Lancashire.
- 1792. The Liverpool carpenters and the Lancashire miners. Combinations in Sheffield. The Gloucestershire miners. The seamen of Norfolk, Tynemouth and Aberdeen.
- 1793. The scythemakers and the shag weavers.
- 1799. The Lancashire cotton weavers.

(1). *Thomas B. Bayley, J.P., and Henry Norris, J.P., to Henry Dundas*¹

Hope, near Manchester, Tuesday evening, 19 July, 1791.

... The trade of this County is wonderfully prosperous. It produces its attendant evils ; amongst those I include a very numerous and *foreign* population (especially from Ireland), estranged, unconnected, and in general composed of persons who are in a species of exile. These men are full of money from the high rate of wages, and are frequently filled with liquor, and engaged in very *desperate* affrays. We have also now a very general spirit of combination amongst all sorts of labourers and artisans, who are in a state of disaffection to all legal control. The introduction of machinery to abridge labour in weaving, is also a subject, at this time, of peculiar disgust and jealousy. And, I fear, the example of Birmingham,² and an unhappy party spirit about the Revolution in France, heightened by the **meetings** on the 14th instant³ (which I believe none of the magistrates in this County *approved, countenanced or attended*) has added **to the** general ill-humour and may be a pretext for mischief and e ... (H.0.42/19).

¹ Home Secretary, June 1791-July 1794.

Attacks on the houses of Dr. Priestley, the famous scientist, and other Nonconformist reformers were organised on the night of the 24th by Church and King 'mob.

² The anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, an event widely celebrated by English reformers.

THE LIVERPOOL CARPENTERS

(2). *Henry Blundell (Mayor of Liverpool) to William Pitt*

Liverpool, 14 April, 1792.

I am well informed the journeymen carpenters of this town (and who are a very powerful body of men) had a meeting of some of the heads of them on Saturday evening last, and were heard to say that if the abolition of the slave trade takes place, some houses in the town (which they had marked) should be pulled down.' As Chief Magistrate of this great trading town, I conceive it my duty to apprise you of it, and though I do not (I confess) apprehend much danger myself (having the 30th Regiment of Foot here) yet with submission, Sir, to yourself (and his Majesty's service will admit of it) I should recommend three troops of horse to be quartered in the neighbourhood till the present ferment subsides a little ... It is proper also to inform you that these men have it in agitation to leave their work for the purpose of advancing their wages, and it is daily expected, for it has been long threatened. (H.O.42/20).

(3). *Henry Blundell to Henry Dundas*

Liverpool, 27 May, 1792.

I was informed yesterday afternoon that the great body of carpenters intended to leave their work on Monday morning unless their wages were advanced. I immediately sent to three of them to call upon me, that I wished to speak to them. They came. And in a conversation of some length they told me it was their intention to ask an advance of 4d. per day, but that they should request it civilly and obtain it peaceably or relinquish it ; and I might depend upon it, they would give me no trouble : they would not disturb the peace of the town, and I verily believe they will not. Yet it may not be quite prudent to rely upon this assurance, and perhaps you will be so good, Sir, as to order one of the troops of Grays, which are now at Manchester, into Warrington . . .

There seems too general an appearance of discontent amongst all artificers and labourers, which must if possible be prevented spreading into tumult. Annexed is the copy of a note I have this moment received, which comes from a large body of men, and we

¹ The prosperity of Liverpool as well as of Bristol had been to a considerable extent based on the slave trade, which was not abolished until 1807.

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must either comply with this demand or be guarded against the consequences. The other owners of collieries and flats' in this neighbourhood have received the like notice.

[Enclosure unsigned].

Liverpool, 26 May, 1792 (Copy).

The masters of the coal flats in your employ do hereby give notice that they will not proceed in the said flats after the 9th day of June next ensuing, under one shilling per ton per trip-which they hope you will agree and consent to give without any stop being put to the said business as we are determined not to proceed under that price from that date. (H.O.42/20).

(4). *Henry Dundas to Henry Blundell*

Whitehall, 30 May, 1792.

I have been favoured with your letter of the 27th inst., giving an account of the combinations which have taken place among the carpenters and masters of the coal flats at Liverpool for the purpose of obtaining an advance of wages, and of your proceedings in consequence.

Although there may not be any immediate disposition to riot among these people, it appears from your representation to be extremely necessary that you should be watchful over their conduct, and that you should pursue every legal and constitutional means of suppressing such combinations and of bringing the ringleaders to punishment. From the disposition which has recently been shown by a certain class of people at Manchester, it is not conceived to be advisable at this moment to remove any part of the troops now stationed there from thence unless in a case of absolute necessity, and if such necessity should hereafter exist, of which you must of course be the most competent judge, the Commanding Officer of that place will have instructions to comply with any requisition from you for a detachment from the forces under his orders. (H.O.43/4/21-2).

Flat bottomed boats generally used in river navigation.

THE LANCASHIRE COTTON WEAVERS

(23). *The Rev. Thomas Bancroft to the Duke of Portland*

Vicarage, Bolton, ii April, 1799.

... We have an Association in this town and neighbourhood which at present seems to threaten harm. It is ostensibly formed for the regulation of the wages of the weavers in the cotton trade, but their publications and the arrangement of the plan are able and great. Their aim is, as they phrase it, to *move the County* and ultimately to petition Parliament for *a redress of grievances.*¹ It is distributed into divisional committees and a central committee, and pains are taking to confederate the neighbouring towns, and so to proceed. We have forbidden the publicans to encourage the meetings.

The editor (or rather an agent) for the *Courier* newspaper (as I am informed) has lately been in this neighbourhood to collect subscriptions among the *Clubs* for the support of their paper.² (H.O.42/47)-

(24). *John Singleton to ? John King'*

Wigan, 27 May, 1799.

I beg to enclose you an advertisement, numbers of which are circulated. It is from the same channel as the last I had the honour to send.

I believe the people as a body are very loyal, but their leaders, as far as I know them, the reverse, no doubt ...

In this paper things are much misrepresented, and are calculated greatly to inflame and mislead the labouring class, who, I assure you, are fully employed and *well*, very well, paid for their labour, and before these arts were used to disturb their peace and make them discontented, was both happy and contented.

The demand for manufactured goods is great-and were it possible to make one weaver into two weavers, they might be employed. Although numbers of our people are gone for soldiers and sailors there is still an increase of looms, for if a man enlists, his wife turns weaver (for here the women are weavers as well as the men) and

They demanded the regulation of their wages by Act of Parliament. Pitt's Government rejected the idea of a minimum wage, and passed an Arbitration Act, which proved unsatisfactory.

² The *Courier* was still, at this time, a Radical paper.

³ Under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs.

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instructs her children in the art of weaving ; and I have heard many declare that they lived better since their husband[s] enlisted than before.

I cannot speak with truth respecting the numbers this Society consists of. In Wigan alone they amount to about 700. Their first committee of 21 members is dissolved, and another committee of two members chosen, who meet in private to transact business.'

(25). The Association of Weavers, &c., &c.
To the Public. [printed]²

The present existing laws that should protect weavers, &c. from imposition, being trampled under foot, for want of a union amongst them, they have come to a determination to support each other in their just and legal rights, and to apply to the Legislature of the country for such further regulations as it may in its wisdom deem fit to make, when the real state of the cotton manufactory shall have been laid before it. The members of this Association have no other object in view but the mutual interest of both employers and employed-well knowing that to combine their interest together is the only method to expect success ; being sensible that the fair trader is exposed to difficulties through injurious practices that have crept into the cotton manufactory, and to study his interest is to study their own, for if a fair chance is given to him, theirs of course will follow. These being their sentiments, they flatter themselves with the support of men of this description ; earnestly desiring them to give the situation of weavers, &c. their candid consideration, how every necessary of life has increased in price, whilst the price of labour has undergone a continual decrease ; this being the case, it becomes a duty incumbent on both parties to search out the cause, **and**, if possible, remove it, that the effects may cease. And ye who **are** our enemies, do you not blush to hear these facts repeated-Great Britain holding the reins of universal commerce, is it not

¹ The letter is endorsed by the Duke of Portland : 'Can anything more be done in this case than calling the attention of the magistrates to the facts by a letter to the Chairman of the Sessions or some intelligent magistrate in that part of the County, which is indeed all, or at least the principal part of the manufacturing district ?'

² 1 Enclosed in No. 24.

shameful that her sons should be thus imposed on ? Are you afraid that we should approach the Government, and there tell the truth ?- that ye use the mean artifice of stigmatising us with the name of Jacobins, that ye raise your rumours of plots, riots, &c.

We disdain your calumny, and look upon you with that contempt you merit. To the public we address ourselves-rioting, or any illegal behaviour, we detest, and are firmly attached to our King and country, and to promote their prosperity shall ever be the object most dear to our hearts. How unjustly do those calumniate us who assert that our meetings are calculated to sacrifice the independence of our country ! It is the reverse, for should the clarion ever sound 'To arms ! England is in danger!'-we know what is our duty, and what is our interest ; and not only ours, but the duty and interest of every individual, to rally round Government, and strike the daring foe prostrate at our feet. These being our genuine sentiments, is there anything to fear by us meeting together ? We shall neither interfere with Church nor State, but strictly confine ourselves to a private grievance, which we wish to lay before Government, and it will remain to be determined by it, whether or not our case merits redress ; but having that confidence in Government which ought to be universal, we believe that when our real situation is laid before the Legislature, some method will be devised to ameliorate our condition.

There are some as ignorant of the very laws they pretend to administer, that they would willingly confound our meetings with those which are only calculated to undermine Government : it is wonderful that they are not ashamed to expose their ignorance to the public view-but, that their ignorance may not infect you, we will take the liberty to state that it never was the intention of Government to infringe upon the right of meeting together to lay any matter of this kind before them.

On the contrary, the late laws on meetings' appear to us to be only intended as a bridle to that wild democratical fury that leads nations into the vortex of anarchy, confusion and bloodshed ; if, then, the laws of your country guarantee to you the right of meeting

¹ The Seditious Meetings Act of 1795 (36 George III c. 8) prohibited public meetings of more than fifty persons unless previous notice had been given in the newspapers and to a justice of the peace, if required. It expired in 1799, when an Act (39 George III, c. 79) was passed ' for the more effectual suppression of societies established for seditious and treasonable purposes ; and for better preventing treasonable and seditious practices'.

together to consider of a private grievance of this kind, are you so foolish to be deterred in your proceedings by the misrepresentations of ignorant and designing men, who do more hurt to the Government than good ? Government does not stand in need of a blind attachment, for the more it is considered the more it is admired ; and the friends who are attached to it from understanding are the only real ones to be found

It is the interest of every occupation to step forward and support us ; even the landed property feels the want of regulations in the cotton manufactory ; and to convince the landed interest that this is the case, we will point out the situation of those employed in it. They are continually subject to reductions in their wages, which never find their level. Draw the analogy any distant time back, and what we assert will be found true : but to be more particular, we will suppose a man to be married in the year 1792 ; he at that period received 22s. for 44 yards of cloth. We will follow him year after year ; his family keeps increasing, together with the price of every necessary of life, whilst his wages for labour decreases. Let us look at him in the year 1799, and we shall perhaps find him surrounded with five or six small children, and, to ! instead of 44 yards they have increased the length to 60, and give him only 11s. for it ; and, to make ill worse, he must work it with finer weft ! No wonder that poor rates increase, when people are situated in this manner. A little reflection will show how matters of this kind affect the landed interest.

It is in vain to talk of bad trade ; if goods are actually not wanted, they cannot be sold at any price ; if wanted, 2d. or 3d. per yard will not stop the buyer ; and whether does it appear more reasonable that 2d. or 3d. per yard should be laid on the consumer or taken from the labourer ? A single 2d. per yard would increase the wages from 11s. to 21s., 3d. to 26s. Consider how little it would affect the one, and how important to the other. How impressed with gratitude must that man be with five or six small children, when informed **that** Government had devised certain measures, that where he now received only 11s., he might receive above 20s. for his work.

Ye whose hardened hearts are dead to humane feelings which should always adorn the human mind, may say it is impracticable, **and** are we yet to continue suffering on your barely asserting this ? **No** : we are determined that those who are appointed by the Constitution of our country to redress our grievances, shall have our **real** state laid before them ; and it must be their wisdom that must

THE LONDON JOURNEYMEN BAKERS

individually to strike work unless their wages are raised. Some of them have already given warning to their masters, others are likely to do so in the course of the week.

I have seen some of the master bakers and shall again see them this day. I shall use my endeavours to compromise between master and servant if I can do it properly ; at the same time I shall not lose sight of punishment to those journeymen against whom there may be evidence of unlawful combination. (H.O.42/48)

(3i). *The Duke of Portland to the Lord Mayor of London*

Whitehall, 2 October, 1799.

Every means that a regard for the public interest can suggest will, I am confident, be employed by your Lordship for suppressing this illegal proceeding and bringing to justice those who shall be found to have taken a part in it, and I trust that your Lordship's exertions in this behalf will be very much facilitated by the provisions of the Act which was passed last Session for preventing unlawful combinations of workmen.' (H.O.43/11/261).

(32). *John King to T. B. Bayley'*

Whitehall, ii November, 1799.

I have received your letter of the 7th inst., which I will communicate to the Duke of Portland as you desire.

I am sorry to find that the circumstances you mention have afforded the means of renewing the opposition of the weavers to the Act of last Session ' to prevent the unlawful combinations amongst workmen,' for although it is evident that the Act in question can

⁵ At 7 p.m. on Thursday the 3rd, six journeymen bakers were brought before the Lord Mayor, charged with being active, with many others, in an unlawful combination. The Master and members of the Court of Assistants of the Bakers Company, with many other master bakers, attended, and gave evidence that all their journeymen had given notice to strike unless their wages were advanced according to a plan laid down by a Society of journeymen bakers which they had joined. The Lord Mayor declared that this was the worst combination he had ever heard of, as all classes of people would be the sufferers. Two of the defendants were sent to prison for three months ; the others were discharged with a warning to take no part in future in such illegal proceedings. (*The Times*, 5 October, 5799).

² Of Hope, Derbyshire.

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have no connection whatever with the real cause of the temporary distress among the weavers in your neighbourhood, I mean the reduction of wages, yet the ill-intentioned will not fail to take advantage of it as the cause of the present or any other distress which the weavers may experience.

The Duke of Portland will, I conceive, direct the papers you have enclosed to me to be laid before the Attorney and Solicitor-General, but they do not as far as I can judge of them contain anything to warrant a legal prosecution. You will be the best judge, yourself, but it occurs to me that it would be a good way of proceeding (after in the first place consulting, and arranging the matter with the principal and most intelligent of your brother magistrates) to have without delay as general a meeting of the Bench as possible, with a view first of manifesting to the weavers the readiness of the magistracy to take into consideration the difficulties under which they at present labour, and to explain to them the temporary causes to which those difficulties are only to be attributed ; and secondly, to guard them against being led away by ill-disposed and seditious persons who, without any intentions of assisting them, and without either the wish or ability to do so, endeavour to inveigle them into illegal proceedings and breaches of the public peace ; and thirdly, to apprise them in the most decided terms of the determination of the magistracy to suppress and punish in the most effectual and exemplary manner every such proceeding or any breach of the peace, or any act having such a tendency. It would also, I conceive, be of great service, if the magistrates were at the same time to take such measures as they are empowered by law to take for the temporary extension of the allowance made out of the poors rates, to those weavers who have families, including therein such others as the present want of employment has rendered necessitous.

Some mode of proceeding of this sort, of the execution of which you are a much better judge than I can be, would be the means of rescuing the weavers from the snares which have been laid for them by their enemies, and would tend in a great measure to restore the influence of the magistrates over them by convincing them of the attention which that respectable body is at all times ready to pay to their wants under any circumstances.

You will also be so good as to consider and report to me whether in the present state of things your neighbourhood might not be relieved, and the King's service at the same time promoted, by carrying the recruiting service more particularly into your quarter,

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and what stations for recruiting parties might be the most favourable for this purpose.

Independent of the measures which I have taken the liberty of suggesting to you, you will, I am sure, be more than usually attentive to the emissaries from the Societies, who will be constantly on the watch to take every advantage of the present situation of the weavers. The apprehending any one of these emissaries will, as you know, tend more effectually than any other circumstances, to prevent any serious or regulated plan of operations from growing out of the temporary difficulties you have stated... (H.O.43/11/284-87).

(33). *John King to T. B. Bayley.*²

Whitehall, 18 November, 1799

I have received the favour of your letter of the 16th inst., enclosing the printed papers marked 1, 2, 3, which have been already transmitted by the Duke of Portland's directions to his Majesty's Law Officers for their opinion, the result of which shall be communicated to you by the earliest opportunity. Enclosed I now send you a copy of the opinion of those gentlemen on the papers which I received from you in yours of the 7th inst., on which subject his Grace directs me to inform you that the plan of proceedings suggested by me in my letter of the 11th, and which I am happy to find meets with your approbation in the material points, seems to be in every respect such as may be attended, in your hands and under your authority, and that of the magistrates of the Hundred of Salford, with the most beneficial effects, in counteracting this attempt to excite a spirit of dissatisfaction amongst the workmen in your neighbourhood. .. (11.0.43/1¹/295)

¹ The Radical Societies such as the London Corresponding Society and the Society of United Englishmen (which had been founded in Lancashire before 1997). For their activities see the *Report from the Committee of Secrecy relative to a Treasonable Conspiracy*, 1799. (*Parl. Hist.*, XXXIV, 579-656).

² Mr. Bayley was informed on the 25th that 'It is the opinion of his Majesty's Attorney and Solicitor-General that "no prosecution can be instituted against the authors, printers and publishers" of the papers transmitted by you in your letter of the 16th inst.' (H.O.43/11/305).

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(34). [The following document is a printed Handbill].

New Bayley Court-Hoarse, Salford. Thursday, 28 November, 1799.
At a general meeting of the acting active magistrates, within the hundred of Salford, in the County Palatine of Lancaster, held here this day-

We, the undersigned, taking into consideration the various and repeated attempts that have lately been made to excite a spirit of dissatisfaction amongst the weavers, and others employed in the manufactures of this County ; and by violent handbills and other inflammatory publications, to encourage an illegal opposition to the Act passed in the last Session of Parliament, 'To prevent unlawful combinations amongst workmen,' do hereby signify our determined resolution to maintain, as much as in us lies, due obedience to the laws ; and strictly to watch over, and severely to punish all persons who shall offend in any of the cases above-mentioned. And we do further declare to all persons in the lower stations of life amongst us, that we at all times possess a most compassionate feeling for their wants and distresses arising from the various events which Divine Providence may permit to chasten us, and more particularly at this time, when a sudden check has been given to trade, and a most unfavourable season has not bestowed upon us the kindly fruits of the earth in their usual abundance, we declare our fixed purpose, both as public and private men, to employ every means in our power to protect and relieve all those who are in distress, and who shall conduct themselves orderly, lawfully and peaceably.

'Every confederacy to injure individuals, or to do acts which are unlawful or prejudicial to the community, is a conspiracy.' And, in our opinion, by the common law of England, a conspiracy whether by masters or workmen, whether to raise or to lower the price of labour, ought to be indicted and punished as an unlawful act. It requires little experience to know that at all times, the price of labour ought and must be free and unshackled. It is governed by a greater or less demand, which depends on circumstances beyond the control of masters or servants. Let both these parties seriously consider that their interests are mutual, that one cannot subsist without the other. Let the masters, when trade is dead, consider the times when goods have been, and may again be, in great demand, and in this season afford to their poor distressed weavers every practicable assistance in employment and wages ; and many weavers, and others

THE CORDWAINERS OF WAKEFIELD

(86). *Spencer Perceval to Lord Hawkesbury*

20 October, 18⁰⁴.

I have had the honour of receiving your Lordship's letter of the 17th instant referring me and the Solicitor-General to the reference made to us on 22nd ultimo, of the combinations of journeymen shoe makers and boot closers in the metropolis, and to our report thereon, and transmitting to us the *copy* of a letter' with its enclosures from Air. Dawson, a magistrate of Wakefield, relative to a similar combination amongst the cordwainers in that place, which shews the extent to which these combinations are carried in different parts of the kingdom ; at the same time desiring our opinion how far these additional facts operate as to the mode of proceeding which it may be advisable to adopt to check this very serious and increasing evil, and more pressingly submitting for our immediate consideration and opinion whether it will be advisable under the present circumstances to order Air. White under our directions to proceed with the prosecution and to support the convictions of the magistrates in this case which are represented as likely to fall to the ground from the poverty of the prosecutors and witnesses.

The pressing manner in which your Lordship requests our opinion upon the latter question induces me to return to your Lordship my report upon this reference, without waiting to communicate with Air. Solicitor-General, who is at present at some distance from town.

Air. Dawson's letter only impresses more strongly upon me the opinion expressed in the former report of the necessity of his Majesty's Government taking it into their serious consideration whether they will or will not direct prosecutions of this kind to be openly taken up by the Solicitor for the Treasury. On the one hand it shews that the extent to which the mischief has arisen may perhaps deter private prosecution, but on the other it shews to a certainty that there must be so many cases in which the same interference on the part of Government would be applied for, if consented to in this, as would be extremely inconvenient for the reasons suggested in the former report. With respect to these particular convictions, perhaps your Lordship might not think it inexpedient to take a middle course, and to write to Air. Dawson, informing him that if the prosecutions in question are in the hands, or could be placed in the hands of a respectable solicitor, that that solicitor

¹ No. 85.

THE WEAVERS' MINIMUM WAGE BILL REJECTED

might correspond with Mr. White, the Solicitor of the Treasury, who should have directions to give him the necessary assistance, and also to discharge his bill. This, though not wholly free from all the inconveniences of a more avowed prosecution by the public, is from the circumstance of its not being attended with such notoriety, exposed to fewer of them and in a less degree.' (H.O.48/13).

(87). *R. A. Farington, J.P., to Lord Hawkesbury*

Manchester, 24 May, 1808. 6 p.m.

... The rejection of the Weavers' Bill² is the avowed cause of the disturbance, and an increase of wages in that branch of the manufactory is called for. They profess a determination not to work longer at the present prices, and endeavour to prevent the well disposed from continuing at their looms ... (H.O.42/95).

¹ The following unsigned and undated note is in H.O.42/131 : 'The journeymen boot and shoe makers and boot closers have for a considerable time past, formed themselves into various illegal Societies (chiefly held at public houses) for the express purposes of raising their wages ; and have at each of the said Societies nominated and appointed a chairman or president with a deputy, and a treasurer or clerk to receive and account for monies paid in by subscription : and have likewise bound themselves to each other by various laws and regulations, and have affixed fines of money when any of their members have acted contrary to their said laws.

They have in consequence of forming themselves into these aforesaid Societies adopted every means in their power (either by threats of personal violence or by persuasion) to prevent and hinder every industrious journeyman from obtaining work from any shop within the metropolis, unless he would consent to become a member and receive a ticket to signify his admission therein.'

² A Bill to guarantee a minimum wage. The wages of the handloom weavers had fallen from an average of 2/4d. per day in June 1805, to 2/3d. in January, 1806, 1/7d. in February 1807, and 1d. in January 1808. (H.O.42/95. Col. Fletcher to Lord Hawkesbury, received 24 February, 1808). 'It is a very unfortunate circumstance,' wrote Mr. Farington on 26 May, 'that a very considerable rise has taken place very lately, in the price of flour and oatmeal.' (H.O.42/95). He reported on the 25th that there had been disturbances in Manchester, one man being killed who attacked a dragoon with brickbats, and another being severely wounded. 'They again (as yesterday) intimated their intention of meeting tomorrow. Parties of them went about early this morning, took away the shuttles and compelled many to leave their looms.' (*Ibid.*) Another correspondent, Ralph Wright, said that the trouble in Manchester was due to Irish weavers. 'It is reported that the weavers in the neighbouring towns are much unhinged.' (*Ibid.*, 25 May).

THE LANCASHIRE WEAVERS' IN-OUT, 1808

(88). *The Rev. Charles Prescott and John Philips to Lord Hawkesbury*

Stockport, 28 May, 1808.

As magistrates acting for this and the adjoining County of Lancaster, we think it a duty we owe to Government to acquaint your Lordship with the state of this town and neighbourhood, which, since the Bill, lately before the House of Commons for fixing the price of the labour of the cotton weavers, was thrown out, have been under continual alarm and terror, owing to great bodies of the weavers having assembled for the purpose of obliging the manufacturers to raise their wages, and in the meantime neither working themselves, nor suffering others to work, and of course their families starving ... (H.O.42/95).

(89). *R. A. Farington to Lord Hawkesbury*

Manchester, 28 May, 1808. 6 P.m.

Yesterday and this day have passed without any materially riotous proceedings. No general assemblage of the weavers has taken place, but the whole of the town and neighbourhood, so far as the weaving branch is concerned, are in a state of confusion. No work is carried on, and the well-disposed families, who are inclined to pursue their labour, are prevented doing so by the threats and intimidation held out to them. It has become necessary in many instances to distribute immediate relief to families of the above description until order can be restored. The merchants and manufacturers have formed a committee with the view of assisting the civil power, and of devising some mode of meeting the claims of the weavers, but the accomplishment of this appears to have many difficulties (11.0.42/95).

(90). *Henry Norris to Spencer Perceval*

Din y Hulme Hall, near Manchester, 30 May, 1808.

I am just now returned from a large assembly of the people near this house, collected with the avowed intention to prevent weaving being carried on. When I first got up to them some symptoms of resistance appeared, but upon a quiet representation of the impropriety of their conduct they attended to reason. In the course of conversation they agreed immediately to disperse upon condition that I would represent to Government the real state of the country. This I most readily agreed to.

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THE LANCASHIRE WEAVERS' TURN-OUT, 1808

It is certain that from the very low wages paid for weaving, the weavers are in the greatest distress, and quite unable in many cases to procure necessary food. The language they held forth to me was this-that for the last six months their distress had been well known, and no prospect of being relieved appeared, that, driven to the miserable situation in which they stood, it was indifferent to them which way they perished ; they acknowledged the law was against their present conduct, but extreme want was the cause ... (H.O.42/95)

(91). *R..4. Farington, J.P., to Lord Hawkesbury*

Manchester, 31 May, 1808. 9 p.m.

My last letter would inform your Lordship that it was understood a meeting of certain individuals would take place on this day, to offer conciliatory measures to the weavers. It has taken place, and although I cannot at this late hour enter into the details, it appears to have stilled the disposition to riot for the present. An advance of wages in certain articles has been proposed, averaging about 20%. But as this will not bind the great body of manufacturers to give full employment, or indeed any, to the weavers, I am very apprehensive it may lead to future disturbances, and those at no great distance of time ... (H.O.42/95).

(92). *R. A. Farington, J.P., to Lord Hawkesbury*

Manchester, 1 June, 1808.

I remain of opinion that no great length of time will elapse before the magistrates are again called upon to use measures for preserving the peace of the country. The discontents, as I have before stated, extend to every part of the manufacturing districts in the County of Lancaster, and although a great proportion of the weavers may be satisfied with the prospects held out of an advance in the prices, many will be otherwise, and as it is impossible to hind the masters at large by the Resolutions and recommendations passed yesterday, or to fix with any precision, prices which must vary, not only from the quality of goods of the same species, but the demand for them in the market, I fear these ill-judging people, incited perhaps by some mischievous spirits, will again be troublesome ...

We have reason to believe there is now a strong division among the leaders of the weavers, that is, between those satisfied with the

THE LANCASHIRE WEAVERS' TURN-OUT, 1808

results of yesterday, and those who differ in opinion ... Some intelligence has been conveyed to the magistrates, as if the dissatisfied part of the weavers, or perhaps their leaders, had an object in view beyond an advance in wages, something of a political nature. I am unwilling to think this can extend far, but we are taking pains to gain some more certain information ... (H.O.42/95).

(93). *J. Silvester to Lord Hawkesbury*

Manchester, 2 June, 1808.

I have great pleasure, in the absence of my brother magistrates, to state that peace seems in a great degree restored in this town, though few, if any, of the weavers, are yet permitted to return to their looms, by small menacing parties, mostly to the lowest description of Irishmen, who are so well organised as to be able to elude the vigilance of the Peace Officers. I should not, however, omit to state that of the description of persons desired to return to their work (perhaps 4/5ths of the whole or more) have been relieved by a very liberal distribution of money issued from the parish table.

Many acts of depredation and violence have been committed in the neighbouring towns, and the levies have been very heavy and frequent upon the troops at the barracks, who in every instance have happily succeeded in dispersing the rioters, who now seem composed of every description of woollen, cotton and other weavers and spinners, who become every day more extensive and formidable ...¹ (H.O.4z/95).

The following printed handbill is enclosed in the above letter

ROY TON.

At a meeting of the weavers and other inhabitants of the Township of Royton, it was agreed to submit the following statement of our sufferings, and the cause thereof, to our fellow-countrymen :

As we have been called upon to take part with you in your present proceedings, we, the said inhabitants, feel it our indispensable duty to address you at this important crisis, upon the subject of our mutual distress ; a subject that demands the most serious attention of every one of us, and upon which depends our happiness or misery. While we lament the general distress, we beg leave to suggest that it is our opinion your proceedings are not likely to obtain you relief ; for that distress can only be removed by removing the cause--which cause we have no hesitation in pronouncing is the WAR. To prove which, we need only refer to our dependence upon commerce, and how it is obstructed by the War ; and it is our humble opinion that it is impossible for either the Legislature or commercial characters to remedy the evil by any other means than that of the restoration of peace.

[Continued on p. 99]

I

THE LANCASHIRE WEAVERS' TURN-OUT, 1808

(94). *R. A. Farington to Lord Hawkesbury*

Manchester, 4 June, 1808.

[The Weavers] ... Some have returned to their looms satisfied with the arrangements both in the town and country ; others are still idle, and endeavour by various means to prevent and intimidate the well disposed from working. But with all the endeavours we have used to obtain information so as to identify the persons, hitherto we have been unsuccessful. A committee sit who direct operations, as we believe, but no discovery has been made so as to enable us to seize them. They are in an equally disturbed state in all the villages round Manchester, [as] well as Bury, Ashton-under-Lyne, Rochdale, &c., &c. But as the dissensions among the weavers and their committees are considerable, I hope and trust these will lead in some part to the restoring order and industry ere long.

We have a great number of Irish weavers, who are the foremost and most turbulent in all the proceedings. A considerable fund has been, as I hear, for some time collecting, and is now distributing, but in the whole of their proceedings, there is such secrecy and arrangement, that we find the utmost difficulty in detecting or gaining any information to found proceedings upon ... (H.O.42195).

(95). *Thomas Drake, D.D., and J. Entwistle² to Lord Hawkesbury*

Rochdale, 4 June, 1808.

We beg leave to lay before your Lordship the late alarming situation of this populous town and neighbourhood, occasioned by the recent

[Continued from p. 98]

Fellow countrymen--We have been misrepresented and treated as enemies to our King and country, but we can safely say that our only wish has invariably been a termination of the contest in which we are unfortunately engaged ; and are now convinced that it is an object equally the wish of the major part of the country; and which we believe has been withheld from us by those whose counsels have too long prevailed in this country. Yet notwithstanding, we are ready at all times to forward, in any constitutional manner, that which is likely to be productive of the good we all aim at. But [we] will never lend our aid to any illegal measure ; therefore, by your permission, we will advise you to desist from your present proceedings--return to your families and respective employments, as the neglect so to do will, we fear, only tend to your misfortune and distress.

30 May, 1808.

^s Magistrates for the County of Lancaster.

THE LANCASHIRE WEAVERS' TURN-OUT, 1808

riots and disturbance here. On Monday an outrageous mob of several thousands broke open the private houses of weavers, carried off their shuttles and other implements of weaving. The civil power made every attempt to quell it but in vain. In the evening of that day the Police Office was attacked, the windows demolished by large stones thrown at the magistrates sitting there, who narrowly escaped at the hazard of their lives ; soon afterwards the prison was broke opens and entirely burnt down. During the night money was extorted by a furious mob, menacing to burn the gentlemen's houses, factories, mills, &c., and the lives of individuals were not only threatened, but in most imminent danger.

These illegal proceedings continued until last Wednesday morning when half a troop of cavalry arrived from Manchester, and also the Halifax volunteers ... These illegal and alarming proceedings took place in consequence of the cotton and woollen manufacturers requiring an advance of wages from the merchants who employed them ... (H.O.42/95).

(96). *Henry Fielden to Lord Hawkesbury*

Blackburn, 6 June, 1808.

I think it necessary to enclose for your perusal a letter,² copies of which have been very generally distributed in this neighbourhood. In this, the motives are plainly avowed and the meetings appear to be [no] longer for the purpose of getting an advance in the wages of the weavers but to excite and spread revolutionary principles. Considerable excesses have been committed here, and it will require an immediate and strong military force to prevent a recurrence. (H.O.42/95)

¹ To release a number of riotous weavers who had been committed.

² *Bolton, 4 June, 1808* : Oppressed brethren-We, the inhabitants of Bolton and its vicinity, do intend to meet upon Charters Moss, near this town, every Sunday morning for the space of two months, and hope that our brethren (the poor and oppressed weavers of Blackburn and its neighbourhood) will join them ; at which meetings they intend to discuss the following questions, viz.

i. What is the cause of our present disastrous, unhappy, miserable condition ? Is it not the protracted War, the most unsuccessful and ruinous that has spread devastation over Europe, and rendered our once flourishing country a scene of misery ?

2. What will be the best mode of redress, as the calamities of the people call aloud for reformation ?

[Continued on p. 101]

THE LANCASHIRE WEAVERS' TURN-OUT, 1808

(97). *R. A. Farington to Lord Hawkesbury*

Manchester, 9 June, 1808.

Nothing of a tumultuous nature has taken place in this district since I last had the honour of addressing your Lordship. Some weavers are discontented and have not returned to their looms, and are still clamorous for prices of their own fixing, viz. 6s. 8d. in the pound at least, more than the current prices previous to the disturbance. But I have great satisfaction in stating to your Lordship my opinion that all serious apprehensions have subsided. We have reason to believe that the numbers inclined to work are daily increasing. The appearance of a strong military force has contributed most materially in producing this effect amongst some, and an advance in the wages having taken place is a cause for content with others ... The avenues to Manchester are patrolled by dragoons and special constables to protect people bringing in and taking out their work ; and every measure we can think of is adopted to give the well disposed confidence and security. These have become necessary as many instances occurred of work being taken, and destroyed or damaged by utter strangers to the parties.

Many people, some of them ringleaders, have been taken into custody, and are admitted to bail, or committed for trial according to the nature of the offence. We understand that money for subsistence becoming a scarcity among the weavers, applications are making for assistance from the funds of the Friendly Societies, but these, I think, must prove as fruitless as illegal, for there are few if any consisting wholly of weavers ... (H.O.42/95)

(Continued from p. 100)

3. Is not the British Cabinet the cause of this War ? Did it not spring from that originally, and is it not the inflexibility of that nest of adders, that cripples our trade and commerce, and shuts the foreign markets against our manufactures ?

4. Do not our merchants and manufacturers deserve to lose their property for their parasitical nonsense presented to his Majesty and the Parliament, in which they propose to support the War with their lives and fortunes ?

g. Is it not time to drag the British Constitution from its lurking hole, and to expose it in its original and naked purity, to show to each individual the laws of his forefathers ?

These, and several other questions of the like nature, will be the business of those meetings ...

THE LANCASHIRE WEAVERS' TURNOUT, 1808

(98). *R. A. Farington to Lord Hawkesbury*

Manchester, 10 June, 1808.

... The weavers continue quiet, greater numbers have returned to their looms, and the advance in wages becoming general will, I trust, keep them so. Yet there are still many who are restless and dissatisfied, and over whose conduct it is necessary to keep a watchful eye. We have not ascertained that anything of a disloyal or seditious nature has mixed itself in the present disturbance ... (H.O.42/95).

(99). *Lord Ribblesdale to Lord Hawkesbury*

Manchester, 10 June [1808].

... In this town and in its vicinity the greatest part of the populace have quietly returned to their respective employments. Nor is it in the least probable they should again attempt to disturb the tranquillity of this town or its neighbourhood. At Bolton, however, considerable discontent still prevails ... The price of grain is much reduced, and the wages of the manufacturers have been increased which collectively have had the happiest effect in restoring tranquillity ... (H.O.42/95).

(too). *I2. A. Farington to Lord Hawkesbury*

Manchester, 14 June, 1808.

A very considerable number of weavers assembled yesterday in the neighbourhood of Stockport, but dispersed without committing any outrages.

The weavers in many parts are yet discontented. They require the whole of the manufacturers to sign an engagement for prices, of the weavers' fixing, appear determined not to work until this is entered into, and labour to create fear and uneasiness amongst those who are disposed to be content. In other parts the weavers are generally at work, but this depends a good deal upon the nature of the goods they are weaving ... In some instances I learn the weavers have drawn money from their Friendly Societies' funds ... (H.O.42/95).

(tot). *The Mayor of Wigan to Lord Hawkesbury.*

Wigan, 15 June, 1808.

In this borough and the neighbourhood the principal employment of the people is in the cotton manufactures, and we have within the borough 3,000 weavers. The rejection of the Bill introduced into

THE LANCASHIRE WEAVERS' TURN-OUT, 1808

Parliament to fix a minimum of the wages to be paid to weavers in those manufactures immediately created universal discontent amongst them. And on Monday, 30 May, many of them from the adjacent villages entered the town in different parties and expeditiously collected as many shuttles from the weavers residing here as they could obtain, which they marked with the owners' names and locked up near the places from whence they were taken. Most of the owners of the shuttles were as ready to deliver them as the collectors were to receive them, but in some few cases the owners were intimidated to part with their shuttles by the number of the collectors and the general voice of the people that all shuttles should be taken, and there are few instances where any resistance was made by any of the owners. On the next day many weavers of this town began to collect shuttles at the extremities of the town in a similar manner, and I appointed and swore about 200 special constables and called out the volunteers, and we traversed the town and pursued the weavers, to have apprehended them, but they fled.

We however discovered the places where many of the shuttles had been left, and we seized and afterwards restored them to the owners. We endeavoured to identify the persons who had taken the shuttles, but all the owners (except one) pretended that they did not know any of the offenders. I have committed one of the shuttle takers to Lancaster Castle for felony in taking two shuttles.

... In travelling the streets with the military and constables I was sorry to see so great and general a ferment amongst the lower order of the inhabitants. Their common cry was, 'Give us bread, we are starving!' And though the streets were afterwards quiet, yet the people appeared to be full of rancour and insubordination, and they manifested a disposition to commit acts of violence if they had not been restrained by the apprehensions of exemplary punishment. It must be admitted that the earnings of an industrious weaver are but small, and that provisions are high, and that such a man with a wife and two children can scarcely provide bread for himself and family, and that the present distresses of the weavers and their families are such as were never before experienced, but the trade of this country is now so depressed and confined that the manufacturers must either pile up their goods in their warehouses, which will require an extraordinary capital and can only be adopted by a few individuals, or vend their goods for the reduced price that can be obtained, and under such circumstances the manufacturers are paying as great wages as their trade will bear ... (H.O.42/95)

THE LANCASHIRE WEAVERS

The Directors of the London Dock Company have come to a resolution not to advance their wages and have given notice to the purpose, and that those men who are disposed to work in the docks will be protected.

Ibid. to Ibid., 12 July, 1810 : . . . Very considerable numbers of the labourers have returned to their work without any previous stipulation or condition, and without any hindrance or molestation . . . (H.O.42/108).

(rro). *Henry Feilden [sic] and John Fowden Hindle to John Beckett*

Blackburn, 23 August, 1810.

[Respecting the circulation of handbills in Blackburn and other manufacturing towns] ... These prove a degree of system and combination which in our opinion ought immediately to be checked, and we feel it our duty to submit them to the judgement of his Majesty's Ministers. (H.O.42/108).

[The following handbill was enclosed in the above letter :-]

Blackburn, 16 August, 1810.

To the Manufacturers of Blackburn.

Gentlemen-We, the undersigned, being the committee of weavers, of Blackburn, on behalf of our fellow-workmen engaged in the cotton weaving, beg leave to state,

That from proper information received, they have reason to apprehend a reduction of their wages (small it is, God knows) will shortly be attempted by a few of those who have ever acted as if their sole wish was to destroy commerce, ruin the fair trader, and bring both themselves and the community at large into a vortex of destruction.

Gentlemen, the committee have always considered the true interest of the master and workman as one, therefore when the workmen are poor and wretched (as has been the case with weavers for a long time) the masters' property inevitably suffers. To make this clearly understood, suppose a manufacturer employs 200 weavers on 60 reeds, at 24s. per cut, and sells the same at about 50s. per piece, we may reasonably suppose such a master turns over £250 weekly ; then admit he abates his workmen to 16s. per cut, he will at least lessen his returns £40 per week, or near £2,000 in one year ; now let it be granted that money in commerce is worth 0%, and lie sustains

THE LANCASHIRE WEAVERS

an absolute loss of £200 a year, by the unjust system of reducing his wages on every little slackness in the market.

To this loss might also be added the increased number of paupers and consequent rise of poor rates, &c., &c.

Having proved thus much, we have only to add that by an Association of the manufacture[r]s of Lancashire and cordial co-operation of the workmen, such dreadful evils might at any time be prevented ; accordingly we submit the following plan to your serious consideration. It is simply this : reduce the quantity of goods when the market is overstocked, and their value will undoubtedly increase with the scarcity.

Gentlemen, the whole body of weavers in this town have come to a determination not to submit to a reduction of prices, but will rather be limited in the quantity of their work, and will, in conjunction with their masters, bear every privation for a few weeks or months, until a change takes place in the markets.

They are willing immediately to enter into subscriptions for the relief of small families, who might in the first instance be hurt by the measure, and also to send proper persons and documents to all the towns in connection with *Blackburn*, so that the whole body may act as one in a cause so interesting.

The remainder, Gentlemen, rests with you. The moment is urgent unite, therefore, instantly, and by your laudable endeavours preserve the trade from impending ruin, and secure yourselves the good wishes of 400,000 fellow-creatures. ¹ (H.O.42/108).

¹ Twenty-three signatures follow. The worst fears of the weavers were justified. In 1811 about 8,000 Stockport weavers petitioned the Government about their distressed situation. For a considerable time, they said, they had laboured under the most severe privations and had suffered hardships unequalled in the history of commerce. Their wages had been progressively reduced, whilst house rent, taxes, poor rates and the necessaries of life had regularly increased. The constant succession of bankruptcies had resulted in an extraordinary increase in the number of applications for parochial assistance. Great numbers were out of work ; the wages paid to those still employed, had in six months been reduced by half. The petitioners were unable to procure enough food for themselves and families, and they were contracting debts which they would never be able to repay. Thomas Bentley signed the petition on their behalf ; it was transmitted to the Government in April, and Mr. Dock t forwarded it to the Board of Trade on 2 May. Three weeks later the Board replied that it was unaware of any measures that could be taken to relieve the weavers beyond those which Parliament had recently adopted-an advance of Exchequer Bills to enable manufacturers to keep their workmen employed. (H.O.42f115).

TILE LANCASHIRE MINERS

(30.). *Colonel Fletcher to Viscount Sidmouth*

Bolton-le-Willows, 22 September, 1818.

For more than a week past, the weavers of this town and neighbourhood had, for the most part, returned to their employment, but I fear under some concessions on the part of the masters, either expressed or implied. Their leaders endeavoured to prevent their return, by various falsehoods, but finding their inability to dupe them much longer, they made a virtue of necessity, and published a sort of permission for the resumption of their work, thereby the better to keep up an opinion of their consequence amongst the working classes, and, no doubt, also, with the view of continuing in the direction of their affairs and deriving therefrom a maintenance without manual labour ...

Another turn-out of this body [the Bolton weavers] was contemplated, probably with the view of supporting the weavers of Preston, Blackburn, Burnley, &c.; but the design is for the present laid aside ...

The turn-out of the weavers has afforded to the designing Jacobins the means of organising that great portion of our Lancashire population. Under the alluring pretext of procuring an advance of wages, an ascendancy in their proceedings has been obtained by the leaders that will, I fear, be used to the worst of purposes ...

The miners have all returned to their employment, but in most instances with an understanding that their wages were to be advanced. My own colliers that had turned out have returned to their work without any promise of advance, and the *four* who had been committed to the Castle at Lancaster for three months for combination, have humbly signified their wish to return to their work, and solicited my interposition to endeavour to procure his Majesty's pardon.

Thinking that the confinement of these men has had a salutary effect in checking the further spread of collier turn-outs, and that their return to their homes and employments will be as efficacious to prevent a recurrence of such combinations as a continuance in prison to the term of their commitment, I humbly presume to request that his Majesty's pardon may be extended to Thomas Haworth, William Greenhalgh, James Taylor and Robert Norris, who were committed on the 26th of August last for the term of three months, by James Watkins and Joseph. Watkins, Esquires . .

(H.O. 42/180).

THE DURHAM MINERS

(305). *Joseph Forster (Mayor) to Viscount Sidmouth*

Newcastle-on-Tyne, 6 October, 1818.

A few days ago the sailors at Shields, collected in some numbers in consequence of unfavourable winds which detained their ships in port, had begun to complain of the smallness of their wages, and threatened a suspension of work if they were not increased. The owners of the vessels were led to give an advance by agreeing to pay £4 instead of £3 a voyage, and the wind at the same time becoming favourable, the seaman agreed to go to sea with that advance, and the disturbance which might have been apprehended has been prevented. As, however, these compliances on the part of the owners often led to further demands on the part of the men, and as their return to port will again assemble them in numbers, it may be as well to guard against the dissatisfaction being revived.

About the same time I received information that the miners in Weardale in the county of Durham, about twenty miles from this place, had stopped work, and had demanded an increase of their wages from their employer Colonel Beaumont. This not being complied with, the men have formed themselves into a large body controlled by what they call a committee, and after having published some inflammatory placards exciting to tumult, have threatened not only to desert their engagements and their work, but to do damage to the mines and to the works if their demands be not complied with.

At present their committee, or a delegation from the whole body, are applying to the agents of their employer by petition in the nature of a menace, and the result is not known nor perhaps can be known for some days ; but being formidable in number it may also be prudent to guard against their being excited to mischief . .

(H.O. 42/181).

(306). *J. Lloyd to Robert Henry Clive*

Stockport, 6 October, 1818.

The colliers in our neighbourhood have been for seven weeks in disorder and [there have been] many turn-outs. Some gentlemen of my acquaintance in Manchester having a considerable concern in Cheshire, some miles westward of this, employed me to go up amongst them on account of some violence and threats to new hands they were employing, and I yesterday morning at 3 o'clock,

THE LANCASHIRE: MINERS

(30.1). *Colonel Fletcher to Viscount Sidmouth*

For more than a week past, the weavers of this town and neighbourhood had, for the most part, returned to their employment, but I fear under some concessions on the part of the masters, either expressed or implied. Their leaders endeavoured to prevent their return, by various falsehoods, but finding their inability to dupe them much longer, they made a virtue of necessity, and published a sort of permission for the resumption of their work, thereby the better to keep up an opinion of their consequence amongst the working classes, and, no doubt, also, with the view of continuing in the direction of their affairs and deriving therefrom a maintenance without manual labour ...

Another turn-out of this body [the Bolton weavers] was contemplated, probably with the view of supporting the weavers of Preston, Blackburn, Burnley, &c.; but the design is for the present laid aside ...

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At present their committee, or a delegation from the whole body, are applying to the agents of their employer by petition in the nature of a menace, and the result is not known nor perhaps can be known for some days ; but being formidable in number it may also be prudent to guard against their being excited to mischief ..
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(306). *J. Lloyd to Robert Henry Clive*

Stockport, 6 October, 1818.

... The colliers in our neighbourhood have been for seven weeks in disorder and [there have been] many turn-outs. Some gentlemen of my acquaintance in Manchester having a considerable concern in Cheshire, some miles westward of this, employed me to go up amongst them on account of some violence and threats to new hands they were employing, and I yesterday morning at 3 o'clock,

THE LANCASHIRE COTTON WORKERS

giving way to the men, who do not appear to have deserved it. The resolution however is passed at the General Meeting ...

The shopkeepers and publicans near the factories will be great sufferers by the turn-out. They have no doubt supported the men under it who are much indebted to them but who will most likely never pay. I am not at all sorry for this. Had it not been for this support the contest would have much sooner ended.

The minds of the operative spinners, as your Lordship may suppose, are greatly dissatisfied at this result of things, but still on the whole, from all I can learn, the majority are not sorry to go to work. I trust and hope that by this contest a great check has been given to the system of combination, and that so serious a one will not speedily occur again.

Ibid. to Ibid., Manchester, 6 September, 1818 :--... The spinners have gone to work *in general I believe with the best intentions - tired of their obstinacy and really happy to get to work.* In one instance only I have heard of its having been accompanied with a threat of a future turn-out when the county at large shall be prepared for that purpose. I hope however this is merely a threat from dissatisfied individuals, and that the feeling does not pervade the body. No concessions whatever have been made on the part of the masters, and in many instances the operatives have been called upon to sign a written declaration that they will not in future be concerned in any combination which they have signed.

I am sorry, however, to be obliged to state to your Lordship that the weavers do not appear to be settled - some are content with the advance proposed, others not, and there are not wanting amongst this body many persons whose sole object is to get the weavers out, and turn the circumstances to other and political purposes. The heads of their committee of combination *are well watched,* and will, I have reason to believe, be shortly brought to justice. The merchants and manufacturers seem fully determined to put down this combination by the most active exertions.

Enclosed I send you a printed form of petition from the weavers for relief.' You will be surprised at the method &c. which it pursues. The magistrates, however, have thought it their duty to issue a printed notice that such subscriptions are illegal, &c., and in the meantime the merchants of this place have had a meeting for the purpose of considering the best means of subduing this confederacy.

¹ See illustration opposite.

THE LANCASHIRE COTTON WORKERS

They will continue to meet for this purpose, and the most fortunate result may be expected from their exertions. The weavers' district is a very extensive one, and will require great exertion! tranquil ... (H.O.42/z80).

(295). *Robert Henry Clive to James Norris*

Whitehall, 6 September, 1818. Private.

... His Lordship is decidedly of opinion that the resolution of the masters to restrict the spinners to twelve working hours per day should not be disclosed at present. The resolution itself Lord Sidmouth considers judicious, but the disclosure of it at this moment would have an appearance calculated to produce very injurious effects. (H.O.79/3/319).

(296). *J. Lloyd to Henry Hobhouse*

Stockport, 6 September, 1818.

... The weavers have adopted a system here of billeting the turn-out weavers, which I shall inquire into tomorrow with a view to some legal steps to prevent it getting to something else of a more serious nature ... (H.O.42/i80).

(297). *Viscount Sidmouth to Colonel Fletcher*

Whitehall, 10 September, 1818.

... Appearances are unquestionably improved at Manchester, Stockport and Bury, and I trust that a favourable change has also taken place at Bolton and Blackburn and other towns which have recently been the scenes of discontent and agitation. It is, however, to be much regretted that any compromise whatever should have taken place with persons who were pursuing their object by illegal means ; and the period is too probably not distant when the effect of concession will be severely felt ... (H.O.41/4/168-f69).

(298). *James Norris to Viscount Sidmouth*

Manchester, 11 September, 1818.

The spinners are at work -the weavers in this immediate neighbourhood are also gone and going in, but in the more distant districts such as Blackburn, Burnley, &c. they are still out, and this

THE LANCASHIRE COTTON WORKERS

are well disposed. They naturally jump at [7s. in](#) the £, but would be perfectly contented with two or three shillings. This has certainly been offered by many masters, a little perhaps through fear, and on this subject I perfectly coincide with your Lordship in opinion, most unfortunately for the general interests of commerce and the community - but as the weavers have been working hard for small wages for some few years, if any description of labourer in this district he entitled to indulgence in this respect, it is the weaver ...

... I have not heard of any projected turnout of any other class of workmen. All the other trades seem perfectly content and at work. (H.O.42/I8o).

[The following advertisement was published in *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette acid Weekly Advertiser* on Saturday, 5 September, 1818 :]

(290). *Employment for Mule Spinners*

A number of steady industrious men, who are acquainted with fine spinning, and can bring respectable characters, may have immediate employment and full work at the spinning factory of David Holt, Temple Street, Chorlton-row.

The spinners who turned out from my factory, and have since associated themselves with the existing illegal combination, publicly declared they had nothing of which to complain, having each of them received a weekly amount, clear of all deductions, of upwards of 32s. for the last six months ; but that they were, by the *alarming threats of the promoters of the existing combination, compelled to leave their employment.*

Commiserating the distress into which many innocent families have been thrown by this inordinate and unwarrantable exercise of undue authority, I hereby give this PUBLIC NOTICE that ample protection will be afforded to the well-disposed who avail themselves of this invitation ; and that, in this way, themselves and their families may be sustained in comfort and credit, and the evil of which the present turn-outs complained, be avoided.

Chorlton New Mills, August 29, 1818.

David Holt.

(291). *William Chippindale to Viscount Sidmouth*

Oldham, 6 September, 1818.

A meeting of weavers' delegates was appointed to be held at Bury yesterday, the principal object of which was of the highest

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importance, it being to decide whether the whole weaving body of **this** county, together with that of the manufacturing districts of Cheshire and Derbyshire, should turn out or return forthwith peaceably to their employment ... They decided in favour of the latter, but not without a struggle of uncommon severity for several hours. A person of the name of Ellison, of Bolton, was the chairman, and he conducted himself with great moderation and propriety. Fortunately, he was peaceably disposed. The advocates for the turn-out were Pilkington of Bury (a man whose character is made up of everything that is bad) together with the delegates from Manchester and Stockport and some others, whose names my informant did not know. The meeting consisted of 52 *delegates*, a number unusually large. On the question being decided in favour of peace and good order, the advocates for the other side manifested the strongest marks of chagrin and disappointment, and my informant represents their countenance as beggaring all description. The greatest efforts were made by them and by Pilkington in particular, to effect the turn-out. The various stratagems he put in practice for that purpose caused so great an interruption to the progress of business that it was long after midnight before the meeting was dissolved. Pilkington paraded for several days the last week at the head of the weavers of Bury, both in that town and in Bolton, in a very menacing way. The whole of the movements in the three trades of spinner, weaver and collier have been effected by the agency of the old disaffected leaders, so well known to your Lordship ...

With respect to the colliers of this district, who have been so great an object of terror whilst out of employment, your Lordship will be pleased to know that the proprietors have arranged their differences with them, and they will nearly all return to their work tomorrow. There is not the *smallest cause* to apprehend any danger to the public peace from them ... (H.O.42/i8o).

(292). *James Norris to Viscount Sidmouth*

Manchester, 6 September, 1818. 11-30 p.m.

... All the mills are to be opened tomorrow at the usual hour. The military will be in attendance to assist the civil authority . .

Ibid. to Ibid., Manchester, 7 September, 1818 :- . . . **It** has been the constant wish of the civil authority here . . . never to call in the **aid** of the military except on some urgent occasion, and I cannot

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leaders as Baguley, Pilkington, &c., &c., must needs be dangerous to the public peace ...

The danger of a committee dictating what wages must be paid, is manifest, and if [it] should be submitted to, a worse than universal suffrage would succeed. It would introduce a mob oligarchy, bearing down all the better orders of society, and would quickly be succeeded by universal anarchy ...

Most of the colliers in this immediate neighbourhood have returned or are returning to their employment, but I apprehend, in some instances, under a compliance of their masters with some part of their demands, for want of a due firmness on the part of such masters (resulting in some instances from fear and in others from a criminal apathy) which is much to be lamented. About Oldham the colliers are universally out. Mr. Chippindale writes that the masters have not courage to proceed against them either for combination or neglect, although the workmen's organised committee sits on stated days at a public house in Manchester as if on legal business.

The master manufacturers of this town on Monday last agreed almost unanimously to advance their weavers' wages three shillings in the pound, which some of the more sensible and honest amongst the weavers openly say ought to be gratefully accepted. This difference of opinion may serve to divide the body and so far tend to good ; but the temper of the lower orders in general has been so soured by the vicious publications which the Press of late years hath teemed forth, continually inflating the people with high notions of their rights, but concealing from them the knowledge of their duties, that sooner or later it is to be feared that some ebullition of popular fury will break forth, requiring not only legal but military execution ... (H.O.42/180).

(289). *James Norris to Viscount Sidmouth*

11 Manchester, 5 September, 1818. Private

The conduct adopted by the magistracy, and the valuable assistance of Sir J. Byng yesterday in pursuing and dispersing by gentle means the body of men from this place who had set out for Ashton, has much contributed, I think, to dispose the main body of weavers into a right understanding of their true interests, and the folly of imposing an arbitrary price of wages on their masters by

¹ Robert Pilkington, of Bury, was one of the Reformers arrested in 1817, and imprisoned without trial, following the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act. His Petition to the House of Commons is in *Parl. Deb.*, XXXVII, 677.

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means of combination, &c. The main body of weavers, I have reason to suppose, have only what they conceive a fair advance of their wages in view, and are therefore now disposed to go to their work upon such advance as their masters are disposed to give -but as in all classes there are many evil disposed, so in this class there are many who will not permit this strong good sense to have effect on the industrious and worthy weaver. This has been evinced today by many attempts having been made by small gangs of eight or ten assembling in the outlets of the town and violently obstructing the weaver in coming into the town with his work. The moment this line of conduct was ascertained, a strong party of constables, accompanied by two magistrates (Mr. Wright and Mr. Marriott) and a Company of the 95th, went to the roads in question and remained there a considerable time to assure the individuals by their presence that they should be protected. This had the desired effect-the delinquents retired on the approach of this civil and military body from the scene of action ...

Today a deputation from Mr. Holt's spinners waited on him to offer to go to work, and I hope this will be the case on Monday. This example will have great effect, and I should not, I confess, be much surprised if many more hands were so disposed and will take the same course on the same day, or Tuesday. Their spirit though not their obstinacy appears broken. They have carried on their opposition as long as they can ; assistance from other trades seems at a stand, and in short they are in confusion at their meetings and uncertain what to do. Monday will be a day of trial, and I trust will produce the most fortunate results, so far at least as respects the spinners. All the mills are to be opened on that day. The military have four or five different barracks assigned them near the principal seats of the factories, &c.; the civil authorities will be in readiness, and if under these appearances the mills get pretty fully to work in a day or two, all will be well. I trust the whole will be a lesson both to the masters and the men, from which they may each learn instruction with respect to their future conduct on like occasions. Mr. Holt's hands on an average netted 34s. per week clear per head.

The colliers, I am happy to inform your Lordship, will most likely all be in on Monday. Indeed, some of those don't understand at this moment why they turned out. I could tell them -an advertisement in the papers inserted by characters who wanted a political or insurrectionary movement ...

With respect to the weavers, the main body of them, I believe,

magistrates to disperse the persons assembled about the mills in the manner therein described, and also as to their right to disperse persons assembled at meetings such as that lately held on Kersall Moor, I have now the honour to acquaint you that it is the Solicitor-General's opinion that if the persons assembled about the mills or on Kersall Moor conduct themselves peaceably and quietly, and there are no circumstances attending the meetings of actual force or violence, or having an apparent tendency thereto, the magistrates will not be justified in interfering to disperse them. (H.O.4¹/4/150-51).

(259). *Henry Hobhouse to William Alarriott*

Whitehall, 10 August 1818. Private.

On the present occasion the master spinners appear to have acted with very little discretion towards their men. I can of course form no judgment whether the claims of the men are either wholly or partially reasonable. But when they were first preferred, or indeed before, the masters ought to have taken that point into their un-biassed consideration, and have taken their resolution as to the line which it became them to adopt., From a resolution so formed, they ought not to recede. But I fear none such has ever been formed, but the men have been set at defiance without considering the justice of their pretensions. After they have been so long resisted, it would be mischievous that they should finally succeed. Government and the magistracy must ever discountenance combination, but they have much to complain of those who give rise to the combination by relying on the support of the law instead of considering the justice of the demands made on them. (H.O.79/3/254-56).

(260). [The following is a copy of a printed handbill].

Manchester, August 19th, 1818.

At a meeting of Deputies from the under-mentioned TRADES from Manchester, Stockport, Ashton-under-Lyne, Oldham, Bury, &c., &c., &c.

Calico printers, dyers and dressers, hatters, blacksmiths, jenny spinners, cotton weavers, bricklayers, fustian cutters, colliers, sawyers, shoemakers, slubbers, mule spinners, machine makers, &c.

The following Address and Resolutions were unanimously agreed to.

At a general meeting of trades convened to take into consideration the distressed state and privations to which the working class

of society are reduced by their avaricious employers reducing wages to less than sufficient to support nature or purchase the bare necessities for our existence, with great economy and hard labour ; therefore, to render redress in such cases of distress to any body or party reduced as aforesaid,

RESOLUTIONS

First - That there be a Union of all Trades called the **PHILANTHROPIC SOCIETY**, to be held in Manchester on the second Monday in every month, when all TRADES shall send a *delegate* with proper credentials for admission.

Second-That every trade be recommended to raise a **FUND** amongst themselves for the general benefit of all trades joined in this Union, and in particular any trade that may be engaged in resisting oppression, or to alleviate distress, and to enable the labouring part of the community to live in comfort and decency.

Third-That any trade feeling the necessity of an advance of wages, that trade shall be bound to give notice to a meeting of delegates convened for that purpose ; and their concurrence being obtained, all other trades will support them.

Fourth-That if any trade be under the necessity of leaving **their** employ through the oppression of their employers, they shall first call the general representatives together and inform them, **provided** that such representatives be not overpowered with too much business at one time, that they may be prepared for supporting the cause and provide for the salve ; in short, no trade shall leave their employ without first calling the other trades together, and then act by and with their consent in taking the most favourable time for resistance.

Fifth -That any body of workmen being oppressed or illegally used, this Society will support them in obtaining legal redress.

Sixth - That all printing of notices, &c. with all delegations, or any other necessary expenses, shall be paid out of their separate funds.

Seventh - That a Committee of eleven persons be chosen by ballot, out of the different trades who form this Society, and shall **be** regularly enrolled on the list kept for that purpose. The Committee to go out by regular rotation every month, so that the whole may be changed every three months.

Eighth -That in order to preserve decorum in this Society or meeting of representatives, no person shall be allowed to advance

at all events very possibly lead to some serious riot and disturbance when the people begin to find they can no longer live upon their means without returning to their labour. I believe their weekly division of the money which they contrive to raise from the other trades is by no means considerable, and that in numbers of instances these deluded people have pawned their furniture &c. for support so that undoubtedly they must be greatly suffering from privation (H.O.42/178).

(235). *Henry Hobhouse to the Rev. If'. R. Hay*

Whitehall, 30 July, 1818, (Draft)

... It is hoped that the disputes between the masters and their journeymen will be adjusted without their giving rise to tumultuous proceedings, and his Majesty's Ministers are satisfied that the good offices of the magistrates will be zealously and discreetly exercised for the attainment of this important object. But while so large a body of men are unemployed, are destitute of the ordinary means of subsistence, and are exposed to the influence of such doctrines as those to which you allude, it is impossible not to feel great anxiety for the issue, and if the peace shall be broken, as firm a reliance is placed in the resolution and vigour of the magistrates for the suppression of tumult as in their temper and forbearance before it breaks forth. They may be assured of the most strenuous support from the Crown, and orders are given for reinforcing Sir John Byng if he should unfortunately feel any doubt of the adequacy of the force now under his command ... (H.O.42/178). *Ibid. to Ibid., Private* ... Even if the views of the unemployed workmen were originally unmixed with politics, it is too much to expect that they should remain so, when they are daily and nightly exposed to the harangues of such men as Drummond, Bagguley, &c. It would therefore be an important measure if the magistrates could find sufficient ground for taking those demagogues into custody.

I am sorry to find that the opinion of some intelligent persons in your country is that as between the weavers and their masters, the former have just cause of complaint, though with the spinners the fault is on the other side. If this opinion is just, it is too much to [be] desired that the master weavers should, before it is too late, be convinced of their error and correct it ... (H.O.79/3/195-97).

(236). *The Rev. If'. R. Hay to Henry Hobhouse*

11 Manchester, 3^o July, 1818. (Private and Confidential).

The difficulty of the situation of those who fill responsible situations here is great beyond anything I ever experienced, and as far as I can judge, likely to increase. I see everything expected from the civil power, and no exertions on the part of those whose interest it is to exert themselves and to act in concert; and I have reason to think that the masters are ready to murmur at the magistrates and the police for not obtruding themselves in situations where they could not act legally and with permanent effect, while they themselves, with instances before them of which they could avail themselves, wholly decline to put the law into action. The magistrates here came to a determination on the question, not to put themselves forward in it - it was, in profession, one between servants and employers. However they might have their suspicions, or perhaps convictions, of the mixed nature of the proceedings, it appeared to them that the first impression was that of combination - that they were the ultimate resort on this question, and that therefore, if for no other reason, they should be the last to stand forward, unless the peace were actually threatened or broken. Mr. Norris informed me and by letter consulted with me on the view the magistrates had taken, and I fully agreed as to them. The masters were advised to act with energy: to publish their declaration that they would protect those of their operatives who were disposed to come to their work, to watch those who obstructed their people from coming, and to offer rewards for the detection of those who should stop them. Nothing of this sort has been done - no declaration on the part of the masters has been put forth, and I think that I may say has been, if ever taken up, wholly abandoned. My impression is that they are collectively and individually frightened, and as fast as a suggestion is offered, they allege generally that it would not be wise to adopt it. They, who have the means, are ready to call upon the civil power for the responsibility, while they neither take or try any effectual means to cure or meet the evil. And in some instances it is easy to collect that they profess an opinion that the civil power

¹ He had written to Sidmouth on the 28th: '... With respect to the dispute between the masters and their men, the magistrates have not in the slightest degree interfered, their sole object being to preserve the public peace ...

assemblage had got together for the avowed purpose of destruction and disturbance in every way in which they could produce it.

I am happy to inform your Lordship that the town and neighbourhood still remain quiet, and except in the two instances I have mentioned, no riots have taken place, but from the disposition manifested by the mob of Monday it is more than probable that the more desperate amongst them are meditating some disturbance beyond that which might possibly arise from the present dispute between the men and their masters. I have already stated to your Lordship that the men out of employ assemble in considerable bodies at the outskirts of the town, and are evidently acting much in concert and under very excellent organisation. Whether there may ultimately be anything political in their intentions and movements I am not able to state to your Lordship, but your Lordship will perceive how easy a matter it might be for the disaffected in this part, and of which I am sorry to say I think we have too many amongst the lower classes to throw politics into the way of these men and convert what at present appears but a turn-out into an engine for alarming the Government of the country and producing a new order of things under the stale idea of a reform, and to insinuate at this time into the minds of these men that this will be about the time for removing all their grievances, as they would term them, by means of a general rising.

I am sorry to inform your Lordship that from all I can learn, Messrs. Drummond, Baguley, Ogden, Knight,' and in short, all the men who disturbed the public peace last year, have been most active for several months past in disseminating amongst the lower orders at meetings convened for the purpose in the different lesser townships in the neighbourhood the most poisonous and alarming sentiments with respect to the government of the country, and have continually inculcated the idea of a general rising, and although I do

¹ They were all well-known Lancashire reformers. Samuel Drummond and John Baguley had organised the march of the 'Blanketeers' on to march, 1817, the purpose of which was to petition the prince Regent against the Habeas Corpus Suspension Bill, and to intimidate the Government into making concessions to the Radicals. John Knight, the itinerant orator, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for taking part in the Burnley meeting on 15 November, 1819, to protest against the action of the Manchester magistrates at 'Peterloo.' The Petitions to the House of Commons of Knight, Baguley and William Ogden (Canning's 'revered and ruptured Ogden'), who were imprisoned under the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act in 1817, are in *Parl. Deb.*, XXXVII. 191, 441, and 412, respectively.

not by any means think that the system of turning out in the different trades is connected with this idea, or that the sentiment itself has taken root in the minds of the mass of the population, yet I am disposed to think that this idea gains ground and that in consequence the working classes have become not only more pertinacious but more insolent in their demands and demeanour, particularly with reference to the spinners who have no reason on earth to ask an advance of their wages except they think that it is one way of coming at the property of their employers. Several inflammatory handbills have been addressed to the public from the press of Ogden ... About ten days after its appearance, the spinners by their Committee had the address to renounce this handbill, which, as far as it went, was certainly well in them.

Baguley, I believe, is ascertained to be amongst them, and I have as little doubt that the rest of the celebrated orators of last year, so well known to your Lordship, are by no means idle at this important juncture. These gentlemen are not unskilful in contrivances, and I am sure they have no feeling of fear to contend with on their own parts, for they are certainly much bolder grown than they were last year, and if they can avail themselves of the present temper of the working people to throw this populous district into disorder, and I might, I think, truly add, rebellion, they certainly will attempt it. The opportunity is but too favourable, but I am not prepared to add that I think their plan is at all organised at present. The impression on the minds of a number of our most respectable merchants, &c. is that an attempt of this sort will certainly ultimately take place, and I trust whenever it does, we shall be prepared to meet it. Almost undoubtedly, if these people continue to travel about the country and disseminate the principle alluded to, it must in the end gain considerable strength in the public mind and feeling.

I understand the minds of the working classes in many of the neighbouring towns are at this time perceived to be in a state of agitation, but their movements and conduct are well watched by intelligent men in their neighbourhood, and I have little doubt timely notice will be communicated to your Lordship through myself or others in the Commission of the Peace, should the thing at all appear to ripen. I certainly myself should not entertain any apprehension but for the circumstance of so many trades and in such numbers having turned out nearly about the same time and from the pertinacious manner in which so numerous a body as the spinners are enabled or emboldened to continue out, and which may

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branch of trade is, I believe, considerably more than the number I have stated. The spinners adopted the practice of assembling in large bodies of two and three thousand each and parading through some of the streets of the town almost daily, certainly still without committing any breach of the peace ; and the magistrates, therefore, for the reason above stated with respect to the dyers, did not think it judicious to interfere. The spinners, from their working in such large numbers together, have a much better opportunity of effectually fulfilling their objects of combinations, and have undoubtedly from the beginning carried on such a system of intimidation against those who are willing to work, that the masters have not been able to break through it, nor to bring any case before the magistrates. The difficulty the masters have is that of identity. Four or five hundred or perhaps one or two thousand assembling from different factories and at the hour of work, viz. 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning, go to a factory at the other end of the town where they are not known, and so carry off by force or intimidation, though without any violent breach of the peace, the hands who might be disposed to go to work-and the parties assembled being strangers, the masters have in no one instance that I have heard of been able to identify persons, so that no case can be made out under the Combination Act. This is certainly a most unfortunate circumstance, because a few strong examples might have the effect of encouraging those to go to work who are willing but who under these circumstances dare not.

The system of support from one trade to another is carried on to an amazing extent, and they regularly sent delegates out to the different towns who are in work to receive their subscriptions. There is no doubt however that, notwithstanding this support, they suffer considerably from privation, but still there is no appearance of their going in to work at the old prices, and the masters, I believe, are generally pertinacious, and with great reason, because the spinners, averaging them throughout the mills in Manchester, gain 30s. per week each hand ; and the larger [the] family a man has, the better for him, because he can employ his children. There can be little doubt but that the spinners have sent their emissaries to different towns in the country, so that all the towns in the neighbourhood are equally well acquainted with what the body of spinners are doing here, and at any day if they thought it conducive to their ends, the whole neighbourhood might be in the same condition. The example of turning out is from all these circumstances.

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reading most widely, and I believe the weavers (who certainly are the most suffering part of our labouring classes) have come to a determination to seek an advance, and committees are now forming in the neighbouring towns have been held with this view. I trust the magistrates will take their case into consideration, and if possible afford them the increase desired, in order that so very large a body as the weavers are in this County may not be added to the extensive number already idle.

In two instances since the spinners have been out we have had riots in this town, but I consider each of them to have been accidental and not premeditated. In the first instance it was an attack upon the beadle of the town, who had been dispatched on a duty near to one of the large factories, and the men, being at that time assembled, which was perhaps natural, considering they had nothing else to do, and the beadle of so large a town being, I had almost said, necessarily obnoxious to the lower classes, they were recognised and were demolished, and myself and a troop of dragoons were obliged to go to the spot in order to release them. A body of special constables were taken to take their trial tomorrow for the offence. It was not, however, without disturbance, themselves being assailed on all sides by brickbats, and 3,000 men.

The latter instance occurred on Monday evening last on the occasion of a fire. A body of about 500 had got together evidently with a view to take advantage of the fire and breed a serious disturbance, but fortunately it did not succeed. The constables who attended at all events kept in check, and the Boeoughreeve very properly sent immediately for assistance to the Barracks ; and for myself I [was] obliged, seeing the inflammatory state of this mob, to read the Riot Act, and as soon as the troops appeared, the mob dispersed, and their being called upon to act. The gentlemen of the town who attended to assist the civil power on this occasion were many of them much bruised and hurt by the number and size of the brickbats, &c. with which they were assailed, and there can be little doubt that this