landlords', whose names were determined by a draw in Manchester on Easter Monday. Success in the ballot provided 4, 3 or 2 acres (depending on whether a one-and-a-half or single share was held by those whose names were drawn). Roads would be laid out, the land cleared for cultivation, drainage installed, and a cottage with outbuildings erected on each plot. In addition each allottee would receive a cash loan for the purchase of stock and equipment. Repayment of this was to be bound up with a rent (over £11 annually for a 4-acre plot), contrary to publicity suggesting that allottees would be freeholders.

Work on 'O'Connerville' commenced almost at once, personally overseen by Feargus who moved into the existing farmhouse in Heronsgate and sent regular bulletins 'from Paradise' to the Northern Star. 'My pale face is turned into a good, sound, sun-burnt ruddy complexion. I can jump over the gates without opening them. I am up every morning at 6 o'clock, and when I look out of my window at the prospect, and think of the number my labours will make happy, I feel myself a giant.' By June the workforce on the estate numbered 200, all hired directly (O'Connor distrusted contractors) and managed by him and a single foreman. For most of the summer O'Connor spent only Wednesdays and Thursdays away from Heronsgate, working in London for the Star and on his personal affairs. Even for the Nottingham by-election in July he spared only a single day.

On Monday 17 August the fruits of this labour were thrown open to inspection in 'the Chartist jubilee'. It was a term freighted with symbolism: Chartists knew their Old Testament and the Levitical institution of jubilee had long featured in the lexicon of English radical agrarianism. At least 12,000 toured the estate, inspected the building work and petted Rebecca the cow (named after the Welsh tollgate protesters and clad in a tricolour especially for the occasion). Most came from London in a carnival of some 100 decorated vans and carts that had threaded its way from Oxford Street early that morning; but there were also contingents from Reading, Oxford, Devon, Lancashire and Yorkshire. Amid the dancing, recitations and speeches, the real star of the occasion was the people's first estate itself. The mood of the occasion was captured in a speech by a recent recruit to the cause, 27-year-old Ernest Jones, barrister, author and son of a former aide de camp to the Duke of Cumberland (since 1837 the King of Hanover). Two weeks earlier Jones for the first time had addressed a Chartist demonstration, 'the birthday of renewed Chartist', at Blackstone Edge on the high moors between Lancashire and Yorkshire. Looking around O'Connerville, Jones declared:

I think we may call this its christening ... we baptise with earth instead of water - and this indeed is holier, since it is the land devoted to the purpose for which God designed it, the maintenance of those till it by the sweat of their brow. (Cheers) When I left London this morning I thought I was only going some seventeen or eighteen miles out of town. I now begin to think I must have made a very long journey indeed, for I have set out to a land that at one time I scarcely ever expected to see. I have come to the land of slavery to the land of liberty - from the land of poverty to the land of plenty - from the land of the Whigs to the great land of the Chart. This is the promised land, my friends!'

Chartist lives:
Ann Dawson

It is one of the most affecting, and certainly most colourful, remnants of Chartist (see frontispiece). Naivety of execution combines with a Anxiety of colour to create an impression at once youthful and sunny, elegant and optimistic. This needlework sampler, depicting the O'Connerville house, is a vivid reminder that Chartist embraced men, women and all, and at its heart was a profound commitment to education and self-improvement. These factors were integral to the so-called 'new move' from 1843 but they had always been integral to Chartist. The handiwork of Ann Dawson, whoever she was, confounds any simplistic division of Chartism into robust 'Connorite physical force', on the one hand, and peaceable Lovettite 'morality', on the other. Consider the sentiments Ann embroidered:

Britannia's the land where fell slavery's chain
Had bound fast its victims in hunger and pain,
Where no eye would pity, when no hand would save
Then came forth to break it O'Connor the brave.
A band of brave fellows, whose hearts caught the soul
Arose from their slumbers and rallied around
Resolved in defiance of fool and of knave,
For freedom to fight with O'Connor the brave.
The Charter and No Surrender.

'The Charter and No Surrender' was a universal rallying cry in the movement, especially after Parliament rejected the first Petition in July 1843.
below it Ann embroidered a book overlaying a ship's anchor, encircled by a wreath of roses, with the words 'bible and hanker' underneath. Below these is cross-stitched a two-dimensional representation, 'The chartist school at o'Connorville near London'. Reading Ann's handiwork, one can almost hear a child's voice breathlessly rushing the final lines of a recitation, for the presentation of the text loses its structure at this point. Overwhelmingly samplers were the work of girls, typically aged between 8 and 15, though examples by boys and older children are not uncommon. Thousands of nineteenth-century samplers survive, typically worked with exacting precision and often expressing sentimental or religious sentiments that lead almost inevitably to the conclusion that these were accomplished only under close adult supervision. However, Ann Dawson's work has a subversive quality, for several reasons. The expression of overt political sentiment in samplers is extremely rare, and the use even of secular verse is atypical of the genre. Ann's work, however, is subversive in terms of technique as well as content. By the 1840s, samplers worked by working-class children tended to be highly stylised. Broadly speaking, embroidered samplers had evolved from the late medieval and Tudor periods, when for female members of elite households embroidery was a recreational pursuit as much as a practical accomplishment. Sixteenth-century samplers were generally 'broad linen rectangles stitched with a collection of motifs often drawn from herbals and bestiaries'. Adding verses was a mainly eighteenth-century development, one which has been seen as inculcating profoundly patriarchal ideals of femininity. Teaching embroidery to the poor gathered momentum in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century. Books were published setting out how this should be done and needlework became a major component of the curriculum of both secular and religiously organised schools. One consequence was a marked move away from spontaneity and ornament, as samplers frequently comprised cross-stitched alphabetical and numerical sequences, the name and age of the child responsible and sometimes that of the school attended. Increasingly the canvas on which they worked was not linen but a woollen cloth, cheaper and easier to work, called 'tammy'. Prolific use of richly coloured silks or mercerised cottons, made possible by the manufacturing and retail revolutions of the eighteenth century, remained a hallmark of samplers worked in middle- and upper-class households. However, those produced by poorer needleworkers, especially in the institutional context of school or orphanage, tended to the monochromatic.

Clearly, Ann's sampler does not fit the above generalisations. It is in the nature of generalisations that there will always be exceptions, but her work is spectacularly exceptional. Visually arresting though it is, it decidedly does not exhibit the order and precision of most surviving samplers. This is suggestive of something natural and unforced rather than the regimented presentation of school work, based on a copybook or a teacher's worked example. Dawson's sampler is also riotously colourful and it is worked on linen. It incorporates both verse and stylised elements from an earlier period which were far less common in the Victorian period. The two diminutive figures in the bottom corners, for example, are 'boxers'. These were common motifs in seventeenth and eighteenth-century samplers, probably derived from an even earlier Italian pattern depicting lovers exchanging gifts (and of course resonant with the biblical figures of Adam and Eve) and gradually simplified by successive generations.

The other striking element is the depiction of O'Connorville's schoolhouse. This too is stylised, very much in the manner of the four-square Georgian-style dwellings depicted on many samplers. Dawson's rendering, though, is also strikingly accurate and can have been based only on close observation of the original or, perhaps more likely, its representation in land plan promotional material. It conforms very closely to the building as it was projected at the time the estate was acquired in 1846. An elaborate, coloured map produced then and echo in an engraving presented to Northern Star readers the following January, shows the building exactly as the sampler does, with 3 doors, 6 lower and 3 upper-floor windows and a central clock tower flanked by a chimney on either side. It is not clear if the school as built (it was completed in the spring of 1847) actually included the tower, which suggests that Ann Dawson copied either the original map (which toured the main Chartist localities) or the subsequent engraving. But she may have been among the throng at the 'People's Jubilee', celebrating the estate's acquisition in August 1846, or the crowds at Mayday and Whitsun 1847, celebrating the arrival of the first 'fustian' freeholders.

Who then was Ann Dawson? It is impossible to say with certainty. From the inception of the civil registration of births in 1837 up to 1843, approximately 350 girls were registered in England and Wales with the name Ann Dawson. The sampler itself offers no clue, nor does its provenance. It is tempting...

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† BL, MAPS, 16251, 'O'Connorville' (1846); NS, 22 August 1846, 8 and 29 May 1847.


§ It was purchased in 1981 by the current owner, Angela Killick, from an antique shop in the Portobello Road, London, whose owner had in turn bought it from an antiquarian.
suppose that Ann was a pupil at O'Connoville, although the settlers included none named Dawson. The inclusion of two stags, the Hertfordshire county emblem, suggests that Ann was a local girl: but stags like boxers were part of the stock imagery deployed on samplers, probably owing to the frequency with which they appeared in heraldry. Moreover, Dawson is not a name appearing in Census records for this part of Hertfordshire in 1851. The name is, though, not uncommon in the Chartist heartlands of the industrial north, and it may be here that some clues to the identity of Ann Dawson may be found. The dominance of male names in records of the Chartist movement necessarily means that identifying her is a conjectural process. She may have been the daughter of any one of several active Chartists with that surname: John Dawson of north Staffordshire (auditor of the Hanley and Shelton land plan branch); William Dawson of Holbrook, Derbyshire (contributor to the Northern Star Victims' Fund); or Isaac Dawson of Droxford (an active member of his local NCA branch).* 

There were at least 63 fully paid up land plan shareholders named Dawson: 16 were weavers, 11 labourers, 4 woolcombers, 3 tailors, 2 spinners, 2 bootmakers and 2 mechanics. Other textile-related occupations accounted for 4 Dawsoms, engineering 3, while book-keeping, floristry, gardening, hawking, iron-moulding, joinery, mining, Stonemasonry and school teaching each accounted for one. So too did the trades of brass polisher, glazier, potter, publican and warehouseman. This occupational spectrum is compatible with a systematic national sample of the membership, wherein weavers, then labourers, are the largest groups, followed at some distance by boot and shoemakers, tailors, stocking knitters, woolcombers and then spinners.† 

A geographical breakdown reveals a similar distribution of Dawsons in Yorkshire (22), Lancashire (11) and Cheshire (7). Finally, the gender breakdown of the Dawsons is consistent with national trends: all are male except Sarah Ann Dawson (a weaver from Bacup in east Lancashire) and two sisters from Droxford, described as 'too young' in the occupations' column of the shareholders' register: their names were Betty and Ann, and their father, according to the 1851 Census, was Isaac Dawson.‡ It is a reasonable conjecture that this Ann Dawson was the young woman responsible for the remarkable O'Connoville sampler, though conjecture is all it can be, not least because she had been born only in 1842. If 1847 (embroidered in the top-right corner) is the date of this work, then its completion by a 5-year-old would be exceptional, possibly explaining the deficiencies in its execution. It is, though, conceivable that 1847 is meant to indicate the date O'Connoville opened and therefore that the sampler was completed sometime after. The coincidence of a signed artefact, typically made by girls of school age, with a land plan member of the same name who was the daughter of a Chartist activist is intriguing. Its implications are worth pursuing further.

Ann, Betty and their brothers Benjamin and Joshua were all shareholders, listed at the same address, Ashton New Road in Droxford. The enrolment of children in the plan was not uncommon, though few families' incomes stretched to enrolling four, which would have involved a sizeable financial investment. Significantly neither Isaac nor his wife Hannah enrolled. More typically parents might enrol just one child, as for example did Jonathan Dawson, a labourer from Attercliffe near Sheffield. Where three or more members of the same family owned shares most, if not all, were wage-earners, for example the Dawsons of Marcham, near Abingdon (Berkshire): Thomas, a hawker, labourers Jonathan and Job, and Jonathan Junior, a gardener. The Droxford Dawsons, then, made a substantial investment in the plan. Yet the 1851 Census makes clear that they were not among the middle-class supporters of Chartist, whose names occasionally appear as shareholders.* Isaac (aged 36 and originally from Huddersfield) was a baker. Because of his non-appearance in local trade directories it is probable that he was employed in a bakery, rather than running an establishment on his own account. Hannah, also 36, had been born in Lancashire, as had the eldest son Benjamin, in 1836. Mother, son and Ann's elder sister Betty were card room operatives, employed in the mills in the tedious, dust-ridden drudgery of preparing cotton fibres for spinning. Very likely they were afflicted by the respiratory illnesses endemic to carders.

Hannah had borne another son, Samuel, in 1848 and the resultant family of 7 supplemented its income by taking in 3 factory weavers as lodgers: Martha Dutton, aged 19 from Huddersfield; Catherine Litherland, aged 20, from 'Woolridge' (probably Woolwich, south London); and James Harty, aged 19, from Colne, Lancashire. Underlining that theirs was a working-class neighbourhood, the Dawsons' neighbours comprised, on one side, a family of cotton spinners and, on the other, a hatter's felt maker and his stepson (again, a felt maker) and two daughters, aged 16 and 20, both of them factory weavers. A short walk up Ashton New Road lived another family named Dawson: Francis and Ellen, both born in Ireland, and keeping house for their 4 daughters (all employed as weavers), 2 grandchildren (the elder, aged 11, employed short-time in a mill) and 6 more weavers who lodged with them.

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* NS, 10 April 1847, 24 August and 7 September 1844, 11 March 1848.
‡ HO, 107/2234/37/15.

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* Analysis based on 1851 Census for Droxford: HO, 107/2234/37/15.
Droylsden was a far from prosperous neighbourhood. Though described in 1841 as 'one of the rural portions of the parish of Manchester', its economy and character were intimately bound-up with its better-known neighbours Ashton-under-Lyne and Stalybridge. In February 1841 powerloom weavers at Droylsden's largest mill had been defeated in a bruising lock-out for resisting a wage cut, and the village, according to Northern Star, was 'one scene of poverty, misery, distress, starvation and want.' Intersected by 2 railway lines, this was confined to cotton, silk, hats, calico printing and dyestuffs. Of its 1841 population of 2,996, almost everyone aged 11 and over was employed in some capacity in the textile industry. There were three nonconformist chapels but, until 1848, no Anglican church. Droylsden could also boast of as many beer-shops (15) as it had shopkeepers, plus 4 pubs.

Ann lived on the main street. Ashton New Road had been laid out in 1826 to improve the route between Manchester and Ashton; its footpaths were made only of cinders and it was totally without lighting until 1848. The combination of textile mills and overwhelmingly working-class residence made Droylsden an almost archetypal Chartist centre. Nearly 3,000 signatures from the locality were claimed for the 1839 Petition, and 2,600 in 1842. Subsequently Droylsden formed its own branch of the NCA and, in 1846–47, of the land plan and its associated Land and Labour Bank. It is indicative of how tightly knit this community to do likewise. Droylsden’s Chartists met first in the Total Abstinence Rooms, but later opened their own premises in a cottage taken for the purpose, just off the Dawson’s road, in Edward Street. Droylsden also acquired a reputation for truculence similar to the Chartists of Stalybridge and Ashton, the town’s first historian noting how in the mid-1850s ‘formidable looking pike heads’ were regularly dug up on open land less than a mile from Ashton New Road.

Droylsden was too small to yield much documented material about Chartist activity. But in our search to understand the world inhabited by Ann Dawson, putative creator of the O'Connoville sampler, we can reasonably infer the existence of a spectrum of activities and opinions similar to neighbouring textile communities. In the smallest townships, Chartism and nonconformity were often the only cultural forces beyond pubs and beer-shops. At Crompton, north of Oldham, ‘there was no mechanics’ institute – no public library – no reading room except one supported by chartists – nor any bookseller’s or stationer’s shop in the place’. These were localities where communal support for Chartism reached near total levels at the movement’s peaks; and where the political commitment of women – typically working in the carding rooms, spinning rooms and weaving sheds of the local mills – was commonplace and seldom remarked on except by outsiders. They might organise tea parties or collect donations for the dependants of Chartist prisoners, but equally they appeared in processions and rallies carrying their own banners. They assumed the role of radical teachers, and they confined their custom to shopkeepers who pledged to support the Charter; formally they might directly organise systematic exclusive dealing, as a meeting of more than 1,000 female operatives resolved to do at Ashton in May 1839. They also issued manifesto statements, sometimes of startling force: ‘Tis better to be slain by the sword than die with hunger’, declared Ashton’s female Chartists in 1839. ‘We are determined that no man shall ever enjoy our hands, our hearts, or share our beds, that will not stand forward as the advocate of the rights of man, and as the determined enemy of the damnable New Poor Law.’ They looked forward to ‘seeing intelligence the necessary qualification for voting, and then sisters, we shall be placed in our proper position in society, and enjoy the elective franchise as well as our kinsmen’.

It was only to be expected, therefore, that children in these communities should in their own way share their parents’ commitment to Chartism. The common practice of naming a child after a radical hero is the best-documented reflection of this. However, historians have allowed the humorous aspects of the practice to deflect attention from the substance of what it meant to be raised in a Chartist household (for who can resist smiling at the thought of Fanny Amelia Lucy Ann Rebecca Frost O’Connor McDouall Leach Holberry Duffi Oastler Hill Boden?). The overwhelming majority of Chartist parents, however, resisted such adulatory gestures, the Dawsons being a case in point. Much more important was the participation of their children in Chartist activities. Few hostile press reports of Chartist meetings could resist diminishing their importance by stressing that youths were present in large numbers; but youthful support extended into other spheres. For example in the general strike of 1842, ‘the first day the mills were stopped, a body of five-hundred


* S.Bamford, Walks in South Lancashire (Blackley, self-published, 1844), p.36; NS, 1 June 1839; P.Pickering, Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995), p.214; quotation from NS, 2 February 1839.
CHARTISM: A NEW HISTORY

268

CHARTIST LIVES: ANN DAWSON 269

girls, belonging to the dissenting Sunday-schools at Oldham, marched at the head of the rioters, singing their school-hymns:

The home itself was an environment with a Chartist dimension. Plates and cups decorated with images of Hunt and, later, Stephens were mass produced for sale in the industrial north. Tens of thousands of prints of leading Chartist and other radical heroes were distributed by the *Northern Star* to adorn walls in readers' homes. William Adams (born 1832) was raised in the home of his grandmother, a washerwoman, where 'one of the pictures that I longest remember - it stood alongside samplers and stencilled drawings, and not far from a china statuette of George Washington - was a portrait of John Frost'. William Farish, a handloom weaver born above his father's weaving shop in Carlisle, recalled: 'I had one of these portraits myself. After being framed by my own hand, [it] served for years to adorn the wall of my bedroom.' Ann Dawson's sampler, clearly not an illustration of work suitable to show a prospective employer, was intended precisely for display in a domestic setting. We can readily imagine it taking pride of place alongside mass-produced artefacts of popular radical culture.†

Children, of course, were also expected directly to contribute to the family economy at an early date. Ann's elder sister Betty probably worked in a card room from the age of 11; she was certainly there at 13 when the 1851 Census was taken. Some time in the mid-1850s Ann followed Betty into the mills: in the 1861 Census she is listed as a cotton weaver.‡ One of the great attractions of the land plan was that it appeared to offer both a practical means to end children's employment in factories and reinstate the mother at the heart of domestic life. If the Dawsons were among the Lancashire pilgrims to O'Connellville on Mayday 1847, they would have heard O'Connor warn to this theme in a speech delivered in the schoolhouse itself:

I have brought you out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage. And must I not have a cold and flinty heart if I could survey the scene before me without emotion? Who can look upon those mothers, accustomed to be dragged by the waking light of morn from those little babes now nestling to their breasts? (Here the speaker was so overcome that he was obliged to sit down, his face covered with large tears, and we never beheld such a scene in our life; not an eye in the building that did not weep.) After a pause Mr. O'Connor resumed: Yes, this is a portion of the great feature of my plan to give the fond wife back to her husband, and the innocent babe back to its

‡ RG, 9/2989/62/27.

NS, 8 May 1847; for a detailed analysis of this speech see M. Chase, 'We wish only to work for ourselves', in M. Chase and I. Dyck (eds), *Living and Learning* (Aldershot, Scolar, 1999), pp. 136-7.

In all likelihood the Dawsons were not at O'Connellville on Mayday 1847;
but they would have read the speech in the *Northern Star*. We can picture Ann embroidering by the window (maybe helped by sister Betty or the lodgers Catherine and Martha), then tidying her work away as the daylight fades. A carder's cough is heard in the unlit street outside. A mother slips to a neighbour's to share news about exclusive dealing. Men talk volubly of Feargus's latest letter 'to the fustian jackets' on their way to the Chartist rooms in nearby Edward Street. All too often the intimate and the personal evade the historian's gaze. We see through a glass, darkly; yet whoever Ann was, her sampler affords us a glimpse of Chartism at its 'grassroots'. And what we see is not mere hunger politics, but an endeavour to improve every dimension of human life.

**CHAPTER NINE**

July 1846–April 1848: 'A time to make politicians'

**Taking stock**

The context of the 1847 May Day rally at O'Connovorville differed considerably from the People's Jubilee nine months earlier, when the estate was first thrown open to inspection. At the most obvious and pressing level of human predicament, the full enormity of the Irish famine was becoming apparent, following the total failure of the 1846 potato harvest and a crisis of mortality over the winter. This had the incidental effect of making the land plan, which was regularly promoted as refuting Malthusianism, appear yet more timely and necessary. Second, within a fortnight of the May Day meeting, Daniel O'Connell had died, bringing to a close one of the most significant and turbulent careers in Irish politics but also opening up a real possibility of co-operation between Irish nationalists and British Chartists. Third, parliamentary politics had been transformed following the resignation of Sir Robert Peel on 29 June 1846 and his replacement by Lord Russell at the head of a Whig ministry. Chartism's, and especially O'Connor's, relationship with Peel was complex and needs to be teased out before the history of the movement in the years after his resignation can be fully understood.

Peel's resignation was occasioned by his Government's defeat on the Irish Coercion Bill (giving it special emergency powers in Ireland). This was not, however, the real reason for his defeat. Four days earlier Parliament had finally repealed the Corn Laws, an epoch-defining moment for England as significant as O'Connell's death would be for Ireland. Only a third of Conservative MPs voted for repeal and Peel had therefore relied on Whigs and Liberals to get the measure through. The price of his success however was to split the Conservatives and to lose office. Peel was admired in Chartist circles. His 1842 budget had been warmly commended by O'Connor and the *Northern Star* for reducing import tariffs and implementing income tax (for the first time in