

Peterloo: 1819 – 2019

by Esmerelda Weatherwax

2019 is the bi-cenennary of the event in English history called the Peterloo Massacre. There was a new film of the story and I expect there will be events in Manchester and Lancashire during the year. I was taught about it in school back in the 1960s but I'm not sure it's on the National Curriculum any more. It should be, 15 Englishmen and women peacefully protesting for better conditions, civil rights and suchlike in the open space of Manchester called St Peter's Field (hence the name Peterloo) killed by the actions of the army and civil militia sent to keep order. But, with the increase of what, 40 years later the writer Charles Dickens dubbed Telescopic Philanthropy, I suspect the events of the film will be a surprise to many young people. If they do go and see it; it hasn't been on a wide release so that I haven't been able to see it myself yet. Telescopic Philanthropy, which Dickens explored in the novel Bleak House is the preference of the English liberal classes to be more concerned with the plight of black and minority ethnic people especially abroad, than with the poverty and suffering of the white working class at home. There is nothing new under the sun. This Punch cartoon is apposite.



TELESCOPIC PHILANTHROPY.

LITTLE LONDON ARAB. "PLEASE 'M, AIN'T WE BLACK ENOUGH TO BE CARED FOR?"

(With Mr. Pouch's Compliments to Lord Stanley.)

I bought a copy of *The Peterloo Massacre*, by Robert Reid (an edition reissued to tie with the film) to study the events in

more depth than I would have done at school, 50 years ago. This was published in 1989 to mark the 170th anniversary. Dr Reid died the following year. Although he worked for the BBC I was more confident in his scholarship from 30 years ago than some of the more recent books.

This isn't a review of the book merely some observations, cherry picking some quotations which struck a chord with our present situation in England (and the wider United Kingdom) and juxtaposing them with more recent events.

A great war had come to an end (in 1815) and as is so often the case in history that event had triggered new attitudes and new behaviour. ...

After that date . . .the letters in (the Home Office files) written by working men surge in number. ..the Sunday schools of the turn of the century had worked marvels. The literate cobbler and the poet-weaver now add to the figures on the canvas to give a far more representative picture from which to scrutinise the lives, beliefs and attitudes of the mass of the people of a nation.

March 1817, thousands of workers from Manchester and the textile towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire gathered in St Peter's Field in Manchester, intending to march in many small groups to London, equipped only with a sleeping blanket (hence their name – the Blanketeers) and their copy of a petition for better conditions to be presented to the Prince Regent. The list of towns from which they came is not dis-similar to a list of Crown Court rape gang trials, Blackburn, Rochdale, Oldham... They were dispersed by cavalry, no one was killed this time, but several hundred men were imprisoned.

Not for the first time, worker's leaders had failed to sustain the movement they had nurtured. ..

The inability of the working class to produce from its own ranks leaders who were effective as well as charismatic

was a weakness which would persist well beyond the beginning of the twentieth century.

It is, of course, hard for a working man to be effective when spies and informants contrive for him to be arrested at the earliest opportunity. The leaders of the Blanketeers ended up in Dorchester and Gloucester gaols, many miles from home.

With the young orators safely removed from their exposed roles as working-class leaders, it took only a few days for peace and quiet to return to the streets of Manchester.

[sentenced to 13 months imprisonment](#) for trying to report on the trial of Muslim men accused for raping and prostituting young English girls. He thought he was within the law; the law thought otherwise.



Throughout that spring and summer (1818) the frequency and size of workers meetings in and around Manchester began to grow. ...Magistrates in Oldham, Middleton, Bolton and Rochdale, besides those in Manchester and Stockport became increasingly confused. . .

The young working class reformers efforts were again

showing results which were already of considerable concern to the middle class.

3rd September 1818 John Lloyd, Clerk to the Magistrates of Stockport observed a parade of weavers on the streets early that Sunday evening.

The only ominous air to the proceedings was that given by the presence of two pipers playing fifes. Lloyd noticed the interesting psychological effect of the music. It transformed an otherwise peaceful occasion into one with a decidedly worrying militaristic purpose.

Lloyd ensured that leaders John Bagguley, a toolmaker, and his friends Samuel Drummond and John Johnston, a Salford tailor were incarcerated in Chester Prison. January 1819, a brushmaker named Joseph Johnson, now that the local orators were confined to gaol, wrote to Henry Hunt a well-known middle class radical from the south of England, inviting him to the next meeting on St Peter's Fields.

The jubilant crowd which followed him out of St Peter's Field filled the streets for half a mile.. Among the banners, magistrates noted, was a 'Cap of Liberty'. This symbol – a tall pole with its ancient cap- was a device descended from Roman times, when slaves had been given their freedom. It had been used effectively on many bloody occasions in the French Revolution. It had now appeared, and had acquired a worrying, threatening significance, in England. It was waved provocatively by a young man as the crowd passed the Manchester exchange.

I like the sound of carrying a 'Cap of Liberty'; however I suspect such a device would be deemed an offensive weapon due to its size and charges would follow.

Many outside this northern melting pot of the underprivileged, the unrepresented, the poor and the

desperate, were now suddenly beginning to see in its bubbling interior the source of great political powers . . . several men in both the south and the north were simultaneously looking to harness this force. Major Cartwright, Sir Charles Wolseley, the 'reverend' Joseph Harrison were a few. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, a few years later, with more understanding of the technological imperatives, would be others.

Dr Reid seems to have realised 30 years ago that whatever you call it, Communism, Socialism, Bolshevism, has not lost sight of its original aim to achieve what George Orwell described as 'justice for the working man' because that never was the original aim. The working class of whatever nation were a tool in the overthrow of western society. Women, sexual minorities were later favourites, now recently discarded. Their current favoured clients, the ethnic minorities (in some areas, majorities in others) they will also try to discard when they think their usefulness is over. Except Islam is using them, and they may find they are thrown over, liquidated and enslaved. It is something not always realised even today. People ask, how can feminists worry about the #metoo campaign but not the abused girls of our industrial towns, FGM, forced marriage etc? How can gays not see what happens to their brothers under Islam? The left are not concerned with the well-being of women or gays. Women and gays are merely tools. The British working class are obsolete tools. Now we are chavs, gammon, scum.

August 16th 1819. Workers, men women and children from all over the Lancashire and beyond began to gather in Manchester, marching into St Peter's Field, which was the traditional meeting place for workers for miles around. It was a flat green, an 'irregular quadrilateral' bordered by the Quaker's meeting house and burial ground, Windmill Street and Mount Street. St Peter's church was just outside. 150,000 could gather without discomfort, 200,000 if densely packed but they

were effectively sealed in by the walls of the surrounding houses.

Women played a great part in the meeting.

...sitting on the drivers box,(was) Mrs Mary Fildes, President of the Manchester Female Reform Union , standing in the road behind her, ready to walk in line, was her committee of women, each member dressed in white.

...many hundreds of women – white frocked, their hair decked with laurel and waving banners. There were even some, including Mrs Fildes...on the hustings.

The Stockport female Union ...launched an all-women delegation of marchers...so too did the Oldham and Royton Unions. The Royton women carried a flag – it was of striking appearance ... it read “Let us die like men, and not be sold like slaves”

I could imagine the Yazidi women of the Peshmerga women's divisions with such a flag as they fought the ISIS jihadists who enslaved their sisters and daughters. Certainly I believe that the workers of the time realised that their situation was no better in real terms than that of plantation slaves. They had no real freedom, and the employers had absolutely no incentive to see that they earned enough to feed and clothe themselves. They were not valuable livestock, an asset; they were vermin.

Steve of Speakers Corner

[They call us names. They don't like being called names.](#)

Stationed in streets surrounding St Peter's Field were various companies of cavalry, yeomanry, regular soldiers and local militia formed due to concern after the Luddite revolt of 1812. The facts are that the armed forces of the ruling

authority were ordered to clear the meeting. They did so using in many cases severe violence. Over 600 people were badly injured. 15 men and women died (and one child, but that could be considered an accident as the cavalryman responsible was on his way to St Peter's Field before the rally began and was trying to catch the rest of his company up). If you want chapter and verse of which troop of horse moved in which direction, at what time, under whose and what orders, you will have to read the book.

Dr Reid examines the aftermath.

There is no easy answer why, in 1789, the French peasantry sustained a bloody and epoch-making revolution while, only 30 years later, after the also bloody experience of Peterloo, the working classes of England most immediately affected by it, returned docilely to their factories.

The Yellow Vest, or Gillet Jaune demonstrations of early 2019 are similar. In France they take place in many cities, every weekend. In Britain once in a handful of cities. Once or twice more in London. Thousands and thousands of people in France. So far only a couple of hundred in England. And the press is against them. As well as the implementation of Brexit another concern of the London Yellow vests is the Justice for our Boys campaign. I have mentioned this before. Three teenage boys killed by a hit and run driver. The driver, Jaynesh Chudasama, who bears a name of Indian origin got a lenient sentence, reduced still further on appeal. His passenger, known locally as a Muslim of jihadist opinions was never charged, despite them both failing to stop and assist at the scene of an 'accident' or assisting the police with their inquiries. The parents of the boys believe that there was at the very least a failure to prosecute/punish appropriately due to the ethnic origins of the driver and his passenger, or at worse a complete cover up of a terror attack. At the first London yellow vest demonstration on 5th January police