

Disrupt? Peterloo and Protest

Large Print Text

30pt

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Text panels on the walls

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The Demand For Reform

In 1819 around 2% of the British population had the right to vote and Manchester did not have its own Member of Parliament (MP). Wages had halved since the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and rising food prices left many unable to afford basic foods like bread. The people wanted a voice and the demand for representation in parliament was growing.

This engraving was printed one month before the Peterloo Massacre. It was designed to warn of the dangers of giving

more people the vote and potential revolution.

The monster in the print represents radical reform; it stands victorious over the cherished British institutions of the arts, royalty and religion. Hostility and fear was growing amongst those loyal to the government and opposed to reform. On 21 July 1819 the Manchester's magistrates announced the formation of a Loyal Association to combat 'the attempts of seditious men to overturn the Constitution and to involve us in the miseries of a Revolution'.

Universal Suffrage or the Scum Uppermost

Hand coloured engraving on
paper

George Cruikshank, July 1819

Purchased by People's History
Museum with assistance from
The National Lottery Heritage
Fund Collecting Cultures
programme.

What Happened On The Day?

Men, women and children walked from towns and villages in and around Greater Manchester.

Some walking nearly 30 miles.

Many had come especially to see the famous Henry Hunt speak on the need for electoral reform.

This rare glass painting shows the Manchester authorities violently dispersing the crowd.

Although different sources give different estimates of the numbers attending the meeting and the numbers killed and injured, it seems likely that 60,000 people attended the meeting, 18 people were killed and around 700 were injured.

This painting is of the central part of a famous print *The Peterloo Massacre* published by radical printer Richard Carlile in 1819. Our research suggests it was probably done by a local artist a few years after the massacre. This type of glass painting was a popular art form in the early 19th century, often displayed in pubs and homes.

Peterloo commemorative glass

Oil paint on glass in a wooden frame

Date unknown

Purchased by People's History Museum with assistance from The National Lottery Heritage Fund Collecting Cultures programme.

The Violence of the Massacre

The magistrates read the Riot Act but nobody heard. The crowd panicked when the yeomanry rode in on horses armed with sabres. They slashed and hacked at men, women and children in an attempt to arrest Henry Hunt and break up the meeting.

The Manchester and Salford Yeomanry were a force of volunteer soldiers working for local government leaders. They were made up mostly of local businessmen and were hostile to the reformers. Hugh Hornby Birley, Manchester mill owner and captain of the yeomanry, ordered the soldiers into the crowd.

More than 300 harrowing eyewitness accounts provide a powerful testimony of the brutality of events on the day. Within these accounts Hugh Hornby Birley's cruelty and violence was often noted. This portrait shows off his wealth and power. We do not have similar portraits for the ordinary protestors at Peterloo.

Portrait of Hugh Hornby Birley, captain of the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry

Oil paint on canvas

Date unknown

Gift from Dr Rick Birley, 2018 with assistance from The National Lottery Heritage Fund Collecting Cultures programme.

The Women at Peterloo

The yeomanry explicitly targeted women during the gruesome dispersal. More than 25% of all casualties were female, even though they comprised only 12% of those present. Women active in the reform movement of the time dressed distinctively in white cotton as a symbol of their virtue. Mary Fildes, President of the Manchester Female Reform Society, was herself truncheoned by special constables when she refused to let go of the flag she was carrying.

A Mrs Mabbott wore this dress on 16 August 1819. She was a

confectionary shop owner from Shude Hill. Rather than being an active participant in the protest, our research suggests that Mrs Mabbott was caught up in the violence of the day.

A silk dress with bodice was expensive and not likely to have been worn by any of the many female reformers present.

However, it does show how much the chaos of day spread through the city centre.

Mrs Mabbott's dress

Fawn corded silk with a white linen lined bodice and sleeves

Around 1819

On loan from Manchester Art Gallery, a gift from Miss A Sherlock, 1948.

What Happened Next?

Despite widespread public sympathy in response to the massacre, the government's immediate response was to toughen laws, which limited the freedoms of both the public and the press. The new legislation became known as the Six Acts. Even with these new oppressive laws, people continued to meet in secret in support of reform. This flag is one of the most impressive survivors from these times. It had to be hidden between meetings and buried in a specially made box. Anyone found in possession of it would have been arrested.

It is believed to have been made in 1819 by a Mrs Bird, a pattern maker from Radcliffe Street in Skelmanthorpe, a village near Huddersfield, to honour the victims of the Peterloo Massacre. The bound man is a depiction of a slave in chains. The use of this symbol reflects the influence of the abolition movement on the new struggles for democracy in Britain.

The Skelmanthorpe flag

Oil paint on cotton with decorative wool edging

Around 1819

On loan from Tolson Museum,
Huddersfield.

The Radical Press

Many braved the oppressive Six Acts, to express their anger in print. The radical press played an important role in keeping the reform movement going. *The Manchester Guardian* newspaper (now known as *The Guardian* national newspaper) began in 1821 as a direct consequence of what happened at St Peter's Field. The attempt to silence government critics only encouraged journalists to develop inventive new ways of conveying the message of reform.

William Hone was an English radical writer and publisher active

in the early 19th century.

In partnership with illustrator George Cruikshank, Hone published a number of political works, most of which aimed to highlight the abuses of political office.

Hone and Cruikshank's *A Slap at Slop* was first published in 1821 as a short satirical news sheet. Most notably, it covers the Peterloo Massacre, featuring a satirical design for both a monument and medal for the soldiers of Peterloo.

A Slap at Slop and The Bridge Street Gang

Card bound with paper text block

William Hone and George Cruikshank, 1821

On loan from the Working Class Movement Library, purchased by People's History Museum with assistance from The National Lottery Heritage Fund Collecting Cultures programme.

Commemorating Peterloo

As well as political prints and poems, everyday items such as ceramic jugs and handkerchiefs immortalised and commemorated Peterloo. Such items showed the owner's support of the reform cause, and helped sustain the memories of its martyrs.

There were a number of commemorative medals produced following the massacre, however, this medal is believed to be one of the only surviving examples of its kind.

It features a much more hostile and angry slogan than medals produced later;

an example of which can be found in Main Gallery One. It is thought that the medal may have been produced to raise funds for the victims of the massacre, although this is unconfirmed.

Peterloo commemorative medal

Iron alloy

Around 1819

Purchased by People's History Museum with assistance from The National Lottery Heritage Fund Collecting Cultures programme.

The Road to Reform

The Peterloo Massacre was a key milestone on the road to democratic reform. The massacre was a catalyst for subsequent generations campaigning for change.

This ballot box is a testament to one of the many milestones that came after Peterloo. The 1872 Secret Ballot Act allowed voters to elect a Member of Parliament (MP) in secret by placing an 'X' on a ballot paper next to the name of their choice, rather than voicing their vote in public beneath the gaze of employers or landlords.

This ballot box was used in the first ever election held after the passing of the act, during a by-election in Pontefract, West Yorkshire in August 1872. The box is still marked with the seals used to ensure the votes were not tampered with. The seal was made with a liquorice stamp, the same liquorice used to make Pontefract cakes in a local sweet factory.

Further milestones of reform can be discovered in the main galleries.

Pontefract secret ballot box

Painted wood and iron alloy

August 1872

On loan from Wakefield Council.

The Masque of Anarchy

The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, upon hearing of the event wrote *The Masque of Anarchy*. Shelley was unable to find a publisher willing to risk imprisonment and the poem was not published until 1832.

The Masque of Anarchy poem

Percy Bysshe Shelley, around
1819

Selected verses of *The Masque
of Anarchy* by Percy Bysshe
Shelley.

Ye who suffer woes untold,
Or to feel, or to behold
Your lost country bought and sold
With a price of blood and gold.

Let a vast assembly be,
And with great solemnity

Declare with measured words
that ye

Are, as god has made ye, free.

Let the charged artillery drive

Till the dead air seems alive

With the clash of clanging
wheels,

And the tramp of horses' heels.

Stand ye calm and resolute,

Like a forest close and mute,

With folded arms and looks which
are

Weapons of unvanquished war,

And that slaughter to the Nation
Shall steam up like inspiration,
Eloquent, oracular;
A volcano heard afar.

Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like
dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many – they are few.

The weaver Joss Wrigley was a veteran of Peterloo.

Here, he tells a young boy what Peterloo was about:

Peterloo, lad! I know. I were theer as a young mon. We were howdin' a meetin' i' Manchester – on Peter's Field, – a meetin' for eawr reets – for reets o' mon, for liberty to vote, an' speak, an' write, an' be eawrsels – honest, hard-workin' folk. We wanted to live eawr own lives, an' th' upper classes wouldn't let us. That's abeawt it, lad. We were howdin' a meetin', a peaceful meetin', an' they sent t'dragoons among us to

mow us deawn. T' dirty devils – they sent t' dragoons slashin' at us wi' their swords. There were some on us sheawtin' 'Stop! Stop! What are yo' doin' that for? We on'y want eawr reets.' An' they went on cuttin' through us, an' made us fly helter-skelter – aw because we were only howdin' up t' banner o' liberty an' t' reets o' mon. Bournes (Burns) says as 'Liberty's a glorious feast.' But th' upper classes wouldn't let us poor folk get a tast on it. When we cried... freedom o' action they gav' us t' point of a sword. Never forget, lad! Let it sink i' thi blood. Ston up an' feight

for t' reets o' mon – t' reets o'
poor folk!'

As recalled by James Haslam,
who heard the account of Joss
Wrigley as a young boy.

Reported in The Manchester
Guardian,

16 August 1919

Manchester Police Office

21 July 1819

The Magistrates and Local Authorities of this district have declared that the peace and safety of these Towns and the immediate Neighbourhood are threatened with great and imminent danger from the attempts of seditious men to overturn the Constitution and to involve us in the miseries of a Revolution, -- the loyal and well-disposed Inhabitants of these Towns are called upon to enroll themselves in an ARMED ASSOCIATION, for the Preservation of Public Peace.

It is not intended to interfere with the time and occupations of those who enroll themselves, more than is absolutely necessary; or to incur any unnecessary expense; and the general plan of the Association will be sufficiently intelligible from the two following Resolutions of the Committee for strengthening the Civil Power:--

1st. That this Committee do not conceive that any uniform will be necessary for such Armed Association,

2nd. That it is in every account desirable that the least possible sacrifice of time should be required in drilling; as it is

considered only necessary that the most simple parts of military discipline should be acquired by such Association.'

Handbill produced by the
Manchester Police Office,
21 July 1819.

Samuel Bamford was a radical writer who led a group from Middleton, a town north east of Manchester, to St Peter's Field. In his own account he describes an anonymous young woman who fought back against the yeomanry:

'A heroine, a young married woman of our party, with her face all bloody, her hair streaming about her, her bonnet hanging by the string, and her apron weighted with stones, kept her assailant at bay until she fell backwards and was near being taken; but she got away covered with severe bruises. It was near

this place and about this time that one of the yeomanry was dangerously wounded, and unhorsed, by a blow from the fragment of a brick; and it was supposed to have been flung by this woman.'

'Taken from Passages in the Life of a Radical'

by Samuel Bamford, 1844.

Men, women and children walked wearing their best clothes, singing songs and carrying banners from towns and villages in and around today's Greater Manchester to attend the meeting at St Peter's Field.

In many towns, the march was practiced on local moors in the weeks before the meeting to ensure that everybody could arrive in an organised manner.

See the flag by the map on the wall, for a list of some towns and villages that those who gathered at St Peter's Field walked from on 16 August 1819.

Fatality List

John Ashton, Age 41.

Profession unknown, from
Cowhill. Sabred and trampled.

Thomas John Ashworth, Age
Unknown.

Landlord of the Bull's Head pub,
Market Place, Manchester,
and special constable.

Trampled by cavalry.

William Bradshaw, Age Around
17.

Profession unknown, from
Lily Hill, Pilkington. Sabred.

Thomas Buckley, Age 62.
Gardener from Baretrees,
Chadderton. Bayoneted and
sabred.

Robert Campbell, Age 57.
Special constable and military
veteran from Miller Street,
Manchester. Beaten in a revenge
attack on 17 August 1819.

James Crompton, Age Unknown.
Profession unknown, from
Barton-upon-Irwell, Salford.
Trampled by cavalry.

Edmund Dawson, Age 19.
Profession unknown,
from Saddleworth. Sabred.

Margaret Downes, Age Unknown.
Profession unknown, from
Manchester. Reported as
'dreadfully cut in the breast by a
yeomanry sabre' and afterwards
'supposed dead'.

William Evans, Age Unknown.
Carter and special constable from
Hulme. Trampled by cavalry and
last reported 'in a dying state'.

William Fildes, Age 2.

From Kennedy Street,
Manchester. Knocked from his
mother's arms by a yeoman's
horse.

Unborn Child of Elizabeth Gaunt,
AGE 0.

From Manchester. Mother
miscarried after being beaten and
imprisoned without medical
attention.

Samuel Hall, Age Unknown.

Cotton spinner from Hulme.

Sabred and trampled by cavalry.

Reported to have died and been buried in Hulme.

Mary Heyes, Age Unkown.
Profession unknown, from Oxford Road, Manchester. Trampled by cavalry, died giving birth to a premature baby. The baby's fate is not known.

John Lees, Age 21.
Cotton spinner and Battle of Waterloo veteran from Oldham.
Beaten by constables.

Arthur O'Neill, Age 40.

Profession unknown, from Pigeon Street, Manchester. Truncheoned and crushed.

Martha Partington, Age 38.

Mother of two, profession unknown, from Eccles. Fell into a cellar and crushed.

John Rhodes, Age 22.

Profession unknown, from Hopwood. Sabred.

Joseph Whitworth, Age 19.

Profession unknown, from Hyde.

Shot by infantry at New Cross on the evening of 16 August 1819.

We may never know the true number of people who were killed at Peterloo. Past errors and recent discoveries mean numbers have changed over the years.

Research is ongoing, and in this bicentenary year 2019, the figure currently agreed by historian Robert Poole and The Peterloo Memorial Campaign is 18 dead.

You may notice that this list is slightly different to the list in Main Gallery One, which shows the nature of evolving historical research.

Peterloo medal

‘The wicked have drawn out the sword. They have cut down the poor and needy and such as be of upright conversation.’

The front of this Peterloo commemorative medal depicts a scene with the yeomanry riding into the crowd, with one holding up a cap of liberty on a pole. The inscription on the back of the medal reads, ‘The Magistrates and Yeomanry of Manchester God Confound Them’, and the inscription round the edge reads,

‘These Things Will Not Endure
Nor Be Endured’.

The more common type of
commemorative medal from the
time includes an inscription on
the back from the Book of Psalms
37th psalm, which can be read
above.

Timeline

Use the cards and pencils to add significant protests to the timeline from 1819 to the present.

Protest Lab

The spirit of Peterloo is still very much alive today across Greater Manchester. From campaigns fighting for votes for women to LGBT+ and disability rights, the people of Manchester and its surrounding towns and villages have taken a leading role in shaping the national conversation on the fight for equality.

This is a space for visitors and local people to use to promote and take part in activism in commemoration of those who

gathered at St Peter's Field in 1819.

If you are interested in using this space for a meeting or an event to promote a campaign, please get in touch to discuss your idea via disrupt@phm.org.uk or ask a member of staff.

How Have You Protested?

Attending organised marches isn't the only way to protest. From refusing to use plastic bags to sharing something online, many of us protest on a daily basis, finding small but effective ways to stand up for what we believe in. As part of Protest Lab we are asking people to add their own objects that tell a story about protest to the exhibition. These could range from traditional items such as placards and badges from a protest march, to everyday objects that tell a personal story of protest. If you have an object that you think is relevant, there will be

drop off days here in the Protest Lab until September 2019 when you can come in with your objects and meet a member of staff – see the dates below.

Drop off days:

Saturday 23 March 2019
11.00am – 2.00pm

Thursday 11 April, 2019
4.00pm – 7.00pm

Saturday 27 April 2019
11.00am – 2.00pm

Thursday 9 May 2019
4.00pm – 7.00pm

Saturday 25 May 2019
11.00am – 2.00pm

Thursday 13 June 2019
4.00pm – 7.00pm

Saturday 29 June 2019
11.00am – 2.00pm

Thursday 11 July 2019
4.00pm – 7.00pm

Saturday 27 July 2019
11.00am – 2.00pm

Thursday 8 August 2019
4.00pm – 7.00pm

Saturday 24 August 2019

11.00am – 2.00pm
Thursday 12 September 2019
4.00pm – 7.00pm

If you are unable to come in to the museum in person, please do not hesitate to contact us on
disrupt@phm.org.uk or
0161 838 9190.

Mapping Activism

Are you involved in a campaign across Greater Manchester today?

If you would like to add an active campaign to the map, please ask a member of staff for a sticker.

You can also share information on the noticeboard for others to find.

Picturing Protest

Send photos of you protesting via email to disrupt@phm.org.uk or tag us on Twitter @PHMMcr using the hashtag #MyProtestPHM

Media Room

Peterloo 2019 is a project marking the bicentenary of the Peterloo Massacre through a programme of public events, learning and creative exploration across Greater Manchester led by the themes of protest, democracy and freedom of speech.

Peterloo 2019 is a project led by Manchester Histories in partnership with People's History Museum alongside a mix of cultural organisations

and communities across Greater Manchester, funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Visit peterloo1819.co.uk for more information.

#Peterloo2019