

# PETERLOO ARTEFACTS

The richness of published and manuscript sources available for studying Peterloo is well known. Less appreciated and researched by historians are those physical artefacts associated with Peterloo available for study in museums throughout the country. Many of the more evocative Peterloo objects have not apparently survived — one thinks of the provocative black banner carried by the Saddleworth, Mossley and Lees Union upon which was tattooed “Equal Representation or Death”, the flag paraded at Charlesworth on the third anniversary of Peterloo with its simple legend, “Murder, 16th August”, the piece of a Peterloo victim’s skull which Hunt displayed to the unreformed Commons in 1832. Even so a surprisingly wide range of artefacts can be examined by historians concerned to understand more precisely, the different means by which the images of the ‘Manchester Massacre’ were disseminated and perpetuated. Copies of the *Black Dwarf* or the *Manchester Observer* were more likely to be lost eventually than a cotton handkerchief upon which was printed a vivid representation of the ‘Massacre’. Such ‘pictures’ must have hung on the walls of many working-class homes. After all, it was only in Howard Spring’s fictional terraced house in Ancoats that a Peterloo sabre was suspended above the mantelpiece. Yet, in real Ancoats’ houses one should not have been surprised to see on the mantelpiece examples of the cheap pottery produced to commemorate Peterloo, passed on from one generation to the next, a continual reminder of the importance of August 16th 1819. This listing draws attention to artefacts such as these which are held in the region’s museums and libraries. It is by no means complete. Numerous Peterloo artefacts remain in private hands. Others are, significantly, in public collections outside the region. The listing however will serve a purpose if it draws the attention of the next generation of Peterloo scholars to this important and revealing source material.

## Flags

Flags and banners are a powerful element in the theatre of public demonstrations, and clearly, as the surviving prints and accounts testify, they played an important role at Peterloo. Not only did they state succinctly the reformers’ demands but they provided points of identity for individuals in the crowd (and, of course, for the authorities). Given the nature of their construction, many

Fig 1. Reverse side of Middleton banner.

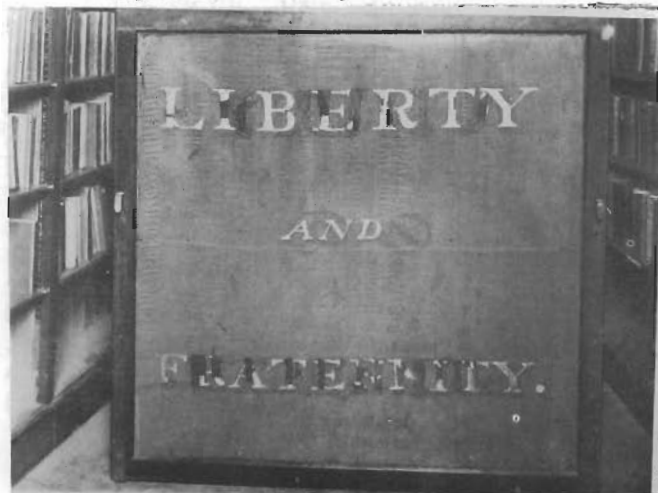
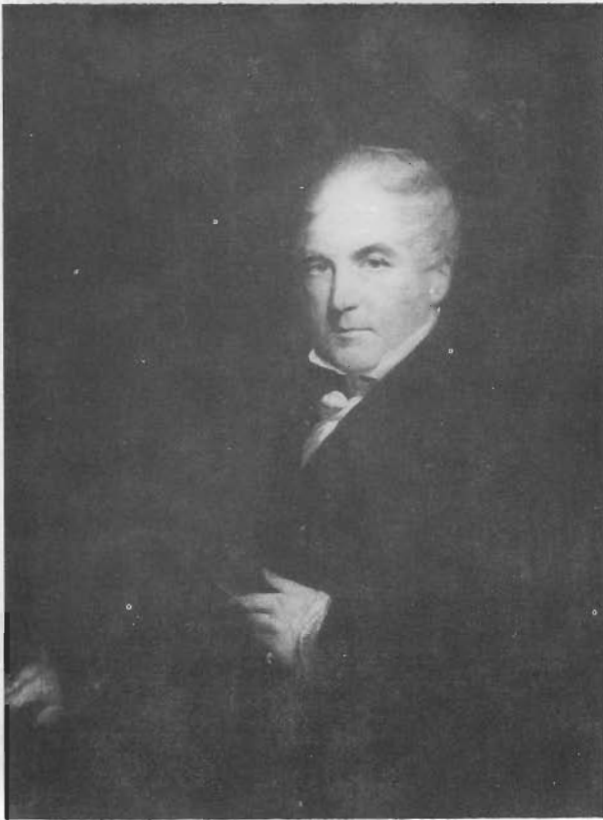


Fig 2. Finial of banner pole.

were probably hastily made and painted, and the difficulties of storing and conserving them, it is remarkable that one of the banners which the reformers managed to carry away from St. Peter’s Field has survived. Middleton Public Library possesses the green banner upon which is inscribed “Liberty and Fraternity” and “Unity and Strength”. (Fig 1). Rochdale Museum also possesses the finial from the pole of a banner upon which is the legend “Hunt and Liberty”. (Fig 2). Unfortunately, the cap of liberty which Bamford tells us was also rescued from Peterloo, and which surely would have adorned such a pole, has not found its way into this collection. However, the collection does contain an interesting trophy — a horsehair plume, red and white, said to be part of a Hussar’s helmet.

## Swords

The raised sword remains, arguably, the most powerful and influential image of Peterloo. To radical reformers it was *the* statement that the state’s power rested ultimately on its ability and willingness to use force to survive. If Yeomanry swords were taken by the crowd during the confusion they remain in private hands or their significance has been forgotten. Two swords with Peterloo associations have found their way into local museums. Ordsall Hall Museum in Salford holds a sword which belonged to Captain Robert Hindley (1771-1855), a founder member of the Pitt Club and Boroughreeve of Salford, who was thrown from his horse during the fighting at Peterloo. (Fig 3). If this was the sword he used at Peterloo its design is such that any manoeuvre turns it



*Fig 3. Captain Robert Hindley.*

into a slashing movement, making it impossible to use the flat side of the blade for crowd control. (Fig 4). In the Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry collection in the Lancashire County and Regimental Museum is the sword presented in November 1822 to Hugh Hornby Birley by the NCOs and men of the Manchester Yeomanry following his acquittal by the Grand Jury on the charges brought against him by Redford. Although such presentational swords were a customary way in the army of expressing loyalty and respect, in the circumstances



*Fig 4. Hindley's sword.*

this token might be regarded, at best, as insensitive. But Birley was not a man filled with guilt or remorse about his role at Peterloo, after all, in 1845 he was buried in St. Peter's Church overlooking what had been the open space of St. Peter's Field.

The Greater Manchester Police Museum possesses a truncheon which belonged to the pawnbroker, Richard Jones, whose actions as a special constable at Peterloo are documented. Rochdale Museum also holds a truncheon bearing the Royal Coat of Arms which was carried by an unidentified special constable at the 'Massacre'. (Fig 5).



*Fig 5. Special constable's truncheon.*

### Medals

Although a small number of medals were issued in connection with political events before 1819, the Peterloo Medal may be regarded as the first major example of this type of commemorative medal. The call for a medal had been made almost immediately after Peterloo: one suggestion was that each of the Yeomanry be awarded a medal inscribed "The Slaughtermen of Manchester". The association with the well-known Waterloo medal — the first military campaign medal presented to all ranks — issued in 1816 was clear. The surviving examples of the Peterloo Medal vary in metal content and in more obvious detail, some possess a ring from which the medal could be suspended from a ribbon. No definite information exists about the designer and manufacturer. Neither is it known if the medal was sold to raise funds for Peterloo victims. The medal depicts the cavalry charging the crowd which includes a woman and child. A man holding a pole on which hangs a cap of liberty is prominent. Beneath this forceful image is the inscription Monday August 16th 1819. The reverse of the medal carries Psalm 37, verse 14: "The wicked have drawn out the sword. They have cut down the poor and needy and such as be of upright conversation". (Page 65). Examples of the medal are held at the Working Class Movement Library, Salford, Manchester Museum (Fig 6) and Ordsall Hall Museum, Salford.



Fig 6. Peterloo medal.

### Handkerchief

One of the best known Peterloo artefacts is a cotton handkerchief (21 inches x 23 inches) upon which is printed John Slack's depiction of the 'Massacre'. Beneath the legend "A Representation of the Manchester Reform Meeting Dispersed by the Civil and Military Power Aug. 16th 1819" it provides a view of the sword-wielding Yeomanry dispersing a surprisingly well-dressed crowd. Women are in a minority but are shown being attacked and trampled. Hunt and others can be seen on the hustings around which are a number of banners, some surmounted by caps of liberty, whose slogans include "Liberty is the Birthright of Man" and "No More Corn Laws". The principal houses stretching from the Society of Friends' school to the Windmill public house are identified. A striking border of ribbon intertwined with palm branches and laurel wreaths repeats the reformers' demands, also identifiable on one of the banners, of universal suffrage, annual parliaments and elections by ballot. (Page 22). Such printed handkerchiefs became popular in the nineteenth century and examples can be found commemorating royal visits, exhibitions and the opening of public buildings. Unfortunately little is known about the Peterloo handkerchief. Who produced it? When? How many were produced? At what price was it sold? Was it used to raise money for the victims of the 'Massacre'? Until such questions are answered its precise place in the memorabilia of Peterloo can only be guessed at. It may turn out to be one of the earliest uses of this form of memento by a political pressure group. A number of the handkerchiefs are available for closer study. In Salford the Ordsall Hall Museum possesses two examples; another one is at the Working Class Movement Library. A single example, recently restored, is kept at Saddleworth Museum. In the collection of the Gallery of English Costume, Platt Fields, three examples exist, two in sepia-brown, and the other, a particularly fine example, printed in purple. It would be interesting to know how widely these were distributed outside the region.

### Pottery

The production of pottery to commemorate royal, military, religious and sporting events and personalities expanded greatly in the second half of the eighteenth

century as innovations in transfer-printing methods enabled large quantities of plates, jugs and bowls to be decorated easily and cheaply. Enterprising or sympathetic potters also found in the political movements of the day another way of selling their products or of propagating their beliefs. Although radical politicians such as Sir Francis Burdett had featured on such pottery, significantly it was Peterloo which first saw the issue of a large number of commemorative pieces. Manchester City Art Gallery has a fine collection of cream coloured earthenware jugs. One jug, with transfer-printed decoration in black over a glaze painted in purple lustre, carries a portrait of Hunt with the words "Hunt and Liberty" and "Bad Luck to the Manchester Butchers". On the other side above a scroll inscribed "Magna Charta" and a banner inscribed "Liberty and Protection" is the verse:

*Henry Hunt that pillar bright  
The father of the poor  
Kind Heaven will protect  
And from villains keep secure.*

A second jug with a pink lustre rim carries a portrait of Hunt, and on the other a view of the 'Massacre' accompanied by the verse:

*The Scripture cries out life for life  
And God ordained it so  
We'll not forget to pay the debt  
Honour'd at Peterloo.*



Fig 7. Peterloo jug.

A third jug with two bands of pink lustre around the rim and spout and one band round the base has a transfer-printed decoration in black of Hunt inscribed "Henry Hunt Esq. The Persevering Advocate of the People's Rights". The other side shows a horseman with sabre raised charging down the figure of Liberty who holds a banner proclaiming "Death or Liberty". Beneath is the inscription "Murdered on the Plains of Peterloo, Manchester 16 August". (Fig 7). A similar jug without the purple bands is also in the collection. Saddleworth Museum also possesses a jug (rim damaged) with these

particular transfer-prints. (Page 42). Rochdale Museum has an earthenware jug which bears the print of a shackled man with the legend "A Free Born Englishman". On the reverse is a scene of the cavalry trampling the crowd at St. Peter's Field. Rochdale Museum also possesses a most interesting jug in that the legend reads "Hunt and Liberty. Bad luck to the Manchester Butchers", but the portrait is not of Hunt but of Commodore Bainbridge, a USA naval hero. This might have been from an earlier run of jugs which the potter had not sold and adapted with the more up-to-date transfers, or having run out of transfers of Hunt used Bainbridge, conscious that not everybody would be familiar with Hunt's features. On the reverse of this jug is the inscription "England expects every man to do his duty, but none of your butchering Cavalry". Other commemorative pieces are also known, such as the jug which is dedicated "To the memory of the Unfortunate Sufferers of Manchester" and which includes a portrait of Hunt, and one of Thomas Wooler above a scroll on which is printed the "Black Dwarf". Plates were also produced which reproduced the Peterloo illustration which appeared in *The Political House That Jack Built*. Again some pieces are in private collections, others held in public museums like the Willett Collection at Brighton Museum.

### Clock

Finally one of the most outstanding Peterloo artefacts is held in the Greater Manchester Museum of Science and Industry. This is a long-case clock, the face of which is surrounded by portraits of Hunt, Wooler, Cartwright and Cobbett. Above the face is a brilliantly coloured painting of the 'Massacre'. The clock was made by W. Stancliffe of Barkisland, near Halifax, and on the evidence of the case style is dated c.1840-1850. (Fig 8). The museum also possesses the bronze plaque of Henry Hunt executed by the Manchester sculptor, John Cassidy, which hung until recently in the Manchester Reform Club.

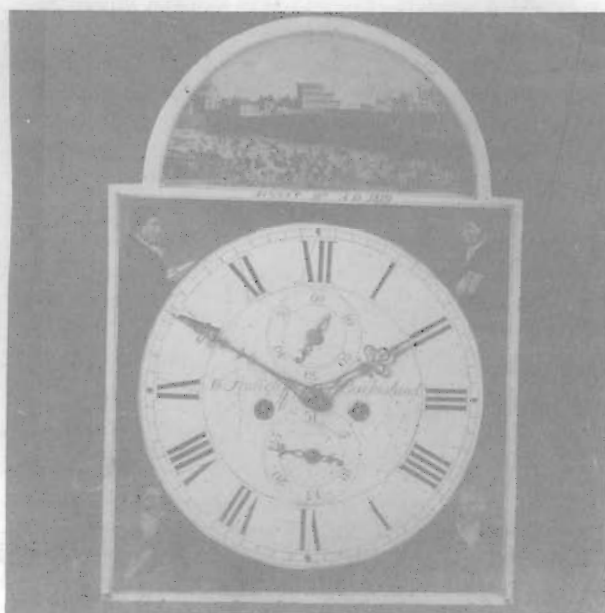


Fig 8. Peterloo clock.

Our thanks to all the curators and librarians who replied to our request for information about Peterloo artefacts. We will be pleased to hear from readers who know the whereabouts of other Peterloo artefacts.

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