

Riots and Protests, Radical Todmorden eTrail script

On this walk you will visit a hilltop gathering place (the Basin Stones) where Chartists in the 1840s demanded the right of all men to vote; learn about the local struggle to resist building a large workhouse; and see where the Plug Riots and one of the Anti-Poor Law Riots took place. If you listen to the mobile app. downloads you will hear modern renderings of ancient Chartist songs and re-enactments of the riots.

This trail (and the accompanying one starting from Hebden Bridge) will take you back to the earlier roots of the contemporary cooperative spirit of the Upper Calder Valley; to the Chartists, the Suffragettes, the Worker's Cooperatives, the Trade Union Movement, the early housing cooperatives and the radical Clarion Cycle Clubs. You will visit the spots associated with the predecessors of the Upper Calder Valley's present day radicalism, not only the buildings of the Industrial Revolution but also the open spaces surrounding them where the protesters were as likely to gather to protest but also to enjoy life.

1. Chartists in Todmorden

Chartism is the name of the agitation aimed at getting the vote for all adult males which was at its height between 1838 and 1848, named from the People's Charter, the petition started by the London Working Men's Association which spelled out six political demands: universal suffrage, equal electoral districts, vote by secret ballot, annually elected Parliaments, payment for MPs and abolition of property qualifications for MPs. These demands were adopted by chartist groups throughout the country, calling for a truly democratic election system.

During the movement there were 3 great surges of Chartist activism; 1839, 1842, 1848, economic crises fuelled extra agitation for the Charter, including a national petition campaign, collecting millions of signatures. Each of these petitions was presented to parliament, and each, contemptuously rejected. There followed tense months where the Chartists were thought to be arming themselves for an armed rebellion or trouble making, much to the consternation of the ruling classes.

Chartism was a national movement, active in main cities and the industrial areas of Yorkshire, Lancashire and the Peaks. Todmorden was an especially important Chartist centre, 'nearly all the inhabitants of this densely populated valley are radicals, their suppers are spent chiefly in reading the NorthernStar' (chartist newspaper).

At the height of the Chartist movement Tod had 700 paid up members, male and female and collected 8400 signatures for the 2nd national petition. Local women were also important in the movement; collecting funds, and signatures, and organising social events to attract large

numbers of local people. During the great strike of 1842, the 'Plug Plot', women strikers marched in procession from town to town, 4-abreast, singing chartist songs as they went.

In the summer, Chartists from all over the Pennines would meet up at 'camp meetings' to hear political lectures and sing chartist songs. They would meet at Stoodley Pike, Blackstone Edge, Hey Head Green at Lumbutts. Meetings were often held near Todmorden as it was quite central for strongly chartist towns; Rochdale, Burnley, Halifax, Huddersfield, yet remote from the law. Oddly enough, the Basin stone was not a regular venue for chartist meetings - only one recorded there - but that was the important one of 1842, where striking workers voted to turn the Plug Plot into an all-out demand for the Charter.

Chartism is important because it was the first mass movement of working people in this country, and so established a method for agitation. A success? It didn't succeed in its objectives in its lifetime, but it did establish the fight for the vote and full citizenship that then entered into the workers psyche, and was eventually achieved for both men and women after many more years of difficult struggle.

2. Calder Valley Voices sing 'The Song of the Low' : a song that Chartists used to sing after speeches at the Basin Stones, Blackshawhead and elsewhere in the area.

<p>We're low we're low we're rabble we know Yet at our plastic power The mould at the lordling's feet will grow Into palace and church and tower Then prostrate fall in the rich man's hall Cringe at the rich man's door We're not too low to build the wall Too low to tread the floor</p>	
<p>We're low we're low we are so low Yet from our fingers glide The silken flow and the robes that glow Round the limbs of the sons of pride And what we get and what we give We know and we know our share We're not too low the cloth to weave Too low the cloth to wear</p>	
<p>We're low we're low we are so low Yet when the trumpets ring The thrust of a poor man's arm will go Through the heart of the proudest king We're low we're low our place we know Only the rank and file We're not too low to kill the foe Too low to touch the spoil</p>	

3. Ernest Jones and the 1846 Chartist gathering on Blackstone Edge

The second song recorded by the Calder Valley Voices especially for this trail: Blackstone Edge, written, by Ernest Jones to mark the 1846 Chartist gathering of up to 30,000 people. Blackstone Edge is about 5 kilometres across the moors to the south.

O'er plains and cities far away
All lorn and lost the morning lay
When sank the sun at break of day
In smoke of mill and factory.

But waved the wind on Blackstone Height
A standard of the broad sunlight
And sung that morn with trumpet might
A sounding song of liberty!

And grew the glorious music higher
When pouring, with his heart on fire
Old Yorkshire came with Lancashire
And all its noblest chivalry:
The men who give – not those who take!
The hands that bless – yet hearts that break –
Those toilers for their foeman's sake
Our England's true nobility.

So brave a host hath never met
For truth shall be their bayonet
Whose bloodless thrusts shall scatter yet
The force of false finality.

Though hunger stamped each forehead spare
And eyes were dim with factory glare
Loud swelled the nation's battle prayer
Of – death to class monopoly!

Then every eye grew keen and bright
And every pulse was dancing light
For every heart had felt its might
The might of labour's chivalry.

And up to Heaven the descant ran
With no cold roof twixt God and man
To dash back from its frowning span
A church prayer's listless blasphemy.

How distant cities quaked to hear
When rolled from that high hill the cheer
Of hope to slaves! to tyrants fear!
And God and man for liberty!

4. Lumbutts Mill and Mankinholes

Below you is the 3-storey water powered mill, of Lumbutts Mill (whose water tower bell played a role in the Anti Poor Law Riots of 1838), Mankinholes, is the village beyond it (scene of the 1838 Riots of which more later) and the new housing estate to its right which was the site of the Victorian Workhouse which the Todmorden Guardians were finally forced to build in 1873.

5. The Mankinholes Riot – taken from Linda Croft's 'John Fielden's Todmorden', 1994.

The Mankinholes Riot: Friday, 16th November 1838 ²⁶

On Thursday November 8th, William Ingham of Mankinholes, who was the overseer for the township of Langfield and a much respected gentleman-farmer, was visited by two police officers who had come from Halifax to mark the goods that would be taken from him and sold if the fine remained unpaid. He offered them one of his cows, but this was refused, and instead they marked goods worth £15, including, as he said, "a French cupboard, which had been taken from the French in the late war, and on which I set great store".

Eight days later, they returned with a horse and cart. William King, the Sergeant of the Watch, and James Feather, the Under-deputy, were not anticipating trouble and were unarmed. They must have had a moment's uneasiness when a young man they met on the road, not knowing who they were, told them how "Th' Old Buck", attempting to auction distrained calico in Todmorden a few days previously, had been nearly stripped, and the calico twisted round his neck. Nevertheless, the officers proceeded to Mr. Ingham's, arriving there at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

Once more Mr. Ingham refused to pay his fine, and so the officers began to remove the marked goods. By now, word was getting around that the policemen had arrived (they had been expected, though it had not been known when they would come), and a crowd was gathering. A woman who was standing on a grassy knoll called out "Ring th' 'larum bell! Ring th' 'larum bell!", and straightaway a nearby bell began to ring violently, followed almost instantaneously by several others, including that of the Fieldens' Lum-butt's factory, which rang incessantly for ten or fifteen minutes.

Hee.

Now the crowd began to cry for the officers to be delivered up to them, threatening to burn the house down if this demand was not met. Ingham appeared, and begged the crowd to spare the lives of the officers, and the reply came back that "we'll spare your lives if you will take an oath before Mr. Ingham, that you will never come on such an errand again, either here or elsewhere, and also go on your bare knees and beg us pardon". The oath was hurriedly sworn - the Methodist Mr. Ingham "accidentally" providing a dictionary instead of the Bible - which advantage passed unnoticed by the cheating crowd. But neither of the officers would submit to the humiliation of kneeling and apologising. The three men stepped outside the house. The crowd pushed Ingham back as they the officers down, beat and half-stripped them, then hounded and peddled them down the road.

The lucky chance of a cart blocking a bridge enabled King to gain the Freeman's Inn at Bottoms, where Mrs. Hallifax, the landlady, toward the pursuing crowd out of her house. Feather was stabbed in the leg while he tried to get into the inn but he managed to struggle on to Wood Mill where a man ranst him into the house of Samuel Oliver, who was a carpenter and brother to the Guardian Keyson Oliver. The crowd broke some of Samuel Oliver's windows, and surrounded the Wood Mill Inn, where the Quakers had just finished the business of the day.²⁷ A few of the windows of the inn were broken, and then the rioters began to disperse, and the remainder were driven off. When all was quiet King was brought over to join his fellow-policemen at Oliver's house. As he remained of their own clothing, each was disguised as a miller before being put on board the stagecoach "Perseverance" which took them back to Hallifax.

6. Workhouse.

Todmorden Workhouse, Todmorden Poor Law Union was the one of the most vehement in its opposition to the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. Its member parishes had resisted forming a Poor Law Union but eventually gave way. However, opposition to the building of a new workhouse, led by John Fielden, held firm with a refusal to pay the poor rates.

A riot took place with the Chairman of the Board of Guardians being attacked. In 1844 the Union was, exceptionally, given leave to abandon the requirement to provide a workhouse.

Finally, in 1876, under continuing threat of the union being dissolved, Todmorden became the last union in England to provide a workhouse when it began to erect one at Lee Bottom near Mankinholes. Ironically, the site on which it was built was on an estate known as Beggarington. The first inmates were admitted at the end of September, 1878, The initial capacity of the workhouse was 100 but in 1890 the buildings were expanded to accommodate 250.

In 1930, the workhouse became a Public Assistance Institution serving the new Calder "Guardian's Area". At that time, it had accommodation for 293, including 69 in the casual wards (60 male places and 9 female). A council architect's report on the buildings noted that they were lighted throughout by gas. The water supply was from a small reservoir in the grounds and was not filtered in any way. Hot water was available in all parts, but only a limited amount of central heating was installed. In the casual ward, there were eight cells for females, twenty cells for males each equipped for corn-grinding work, and a tramp major's room.

The institution later became Stansfield View Hospital and after 1948 provided care for the mentally handicapped. The vagrants' wards were closed in 1950. The buildings were demolished in 1996 and the site cleared.

The Weavers formed the 1st trade union in Todmorden in 1880. The Weavers. started slowly, but by 1900, majority of weavers were members. The Union was also active in the local labour party.

The institute was established in 1914, there are earlier ones, but this is the 1st purpose built institute/trades union building. Weavers union by now were becoming significant and influential in the town concerned with social, political and welfare issues as well as problem solving. This showed the growing working class influence in a changing world, greater influence of working people, which lasted until the late 1950s-60s, and the decline of the cotton industry.