
The Natives Are Very Restless – Loughborough 1859

David Jones

If Elections nowadays seem to give rise to heated debates they are nonetheless much tamer than the Election activities of our Victorian ancestors. Loughborough was no stranger to unrest in the 19th century, but even by local standards the General Election in 1859 was exceptional. At this time only a few people could actually vote because unless a man (and it was men only) had a considerable amount of property he did not qualify. There was no secret ballot and people had to declare openly whom they wished to choose. These circumstances did not deter the people of Loughborough from taking an active interest in the Election. The North Leicestershire Division returned two Members of Parliament and in 1859 there were three Candidates - Lord John Manners, Mr Hartopp and Mr Frewin. All three were Conservatives and it might be thought there was little to argue over but Mr Frewin appears to have lacked the official seal of approval and the townsfolk, for whatever reason, gave him support in the streets.

Trouble was clearly expected on Election Day, May 6th, and, in addition to the County Police, thirty Borough Policemen had been brought in from Leicester and fifty Special Constables sworn in to support the regular officers. There were disturbances during the course of the morning and, at about 1 pm, Frederick Goodyer, the County Chief Constable, arrived in Loughborough by train to take charge of the situation. He found a large crowd outside the Town Hall, many of them in a "state of intoxication" and Goodyer was told that they had been insulting and obstructing passengers in the streets. The crowd had placards and a life size dummy figure of a man which they carried on a long pole. This effigy had a raw sheep's heart pinned to the front with a sign that had the word "UP" written on it. This was intended to be a pun on the name of Mr Hartopp, one of the Candidates who was not favoured by the crowd.

With considerable courage the Chief Constable went forward and talked to the crowd and told them to remove the offending effigy. When the mob refused, he ordered some of the Borough Police to take the dummy and pole away from a man called John Bamford, who was carrying it. In the ensuing struggle both Bamford and a Police Officer were hurt and Bamford was arrested. This incident sparked off more serious violence, with the crowd throwing showers of stones at the Police and the Constabulary attempting to keep the Town Hall from being attacked. A local Magistrate, Mr Middleton, who was in the Market Place, watched the situation with particular concern. Middleton was a Banker and his premises were also in the Market Place and stood to be damaged if the situation became more serious. Braving the missiles, Middleton went to address the mob and then after doing so arranged with Goodyer for the withdrawal of the majority of the Police.

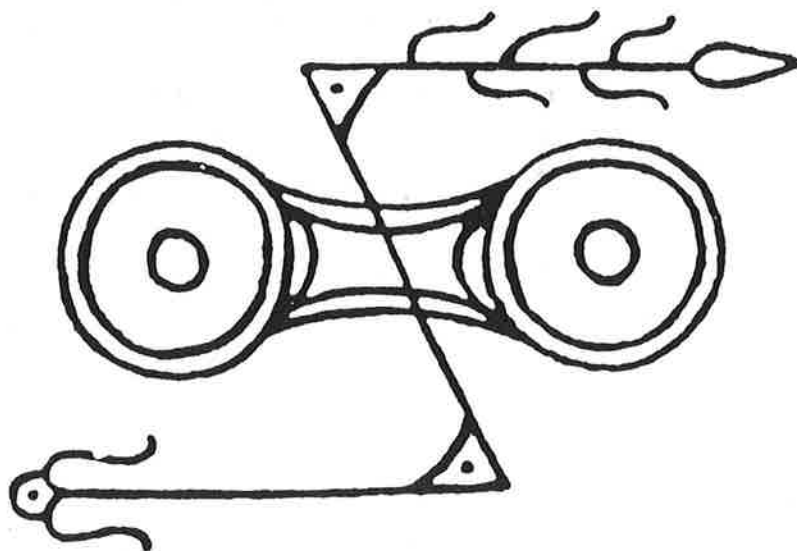
The situation quietened somewhat during the afternoon but by early evening things had grown worse again. The Bull's Head public house (now the Black Bull) in High Street, was under attack because it was the headquarters of Manners and Hartopp. There was more stone throwing and the windows of the Inn were smashed. Middleton again talked to the crowd but, despite promises to disperse if the Police withdrew, the violence continued. By now it was growing dark and missiles were flying in all directions, especially from Baxter Gate. Police Officers, including the Chief Constable and some of the Magistrates, were hit by the flying stones and many of the crowd were by now very drunk indeed. There were many of the crowd who were injured by missiles from their own side. It was becoming

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clear that the Police would have to take action to bring the situation under control. The Police had been withdrawn into the yard of the Bull's Head and had from time to time been making a rush at the crowd to seize some of the stone throwers. The Chief Constable was concerned that the crowd were knocking down and trampling some of their own side during these incidents. By 8 pm in the evening the Magistrates told the Chief Constable that they had tried every means in their power to disperse the mob but without effect and told him to take any steps he felt necessary. Goodyer led a party of Police Officers into the Market Place where he found part of the crowd throwing stones from inside a liquor shop. The Constable began to eject the offenders who were standing in front of the bar and a further scuffle ensued. The violence continued for about three hours until about 10.30 pm and, according to the Police Constable, it grew consistently worse.

Eventually, Goodyer prompted the Magistrates to give him the order to close all the public houses in the centre of the town and this apparently had the best effect in restoring order, because from the time the pubs were shut the disturbance gradually subsided and the streets were quiet by 11 pm. By 2 am in the morning things were sufficiently quiet to allow the Chief Constable to return home by the mail train to Leicester.

Further violence was expected at the Declaration of the Poll in Loughborough, which was due to take place on the following Monday, and the apprehension of serious disturbance was so great that a detachment of Cavalry was stationed at Quorn to be ready to support the Police in Loughborough if necessary.



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