York Castle and its political prisoners: the Luddites in a broader context

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I want to begin with two seemingly unconnected episodes. First, at Easter 1832 around 12,000 West Yorkshire textile workers – men and women – made what was termed at the time a 'Pilgrimage' on foot from communities as far away as Huddersfield, Honley and Holmfirth, to York Castle. The pilgrimage rally was a formative event in the campaign for reform to the working hours and conditions endured by mill workers, especially by children. 'The Poor Oppressed FACTORY CHILDREN cannot be there to plead for themselves' The poster announcing the Pilgrimage declared; but,

> their Parents will, their Benefactors will, the Friends of Freedom, the haters of Oppression will, all will be there who hate the Tyrant's Rod … Rouse yourselves, appear at York, and in one Loud, Long, Thundering voice, let all Yorkshire – and all England hear you swear "Your CHILDREN shall be FREE"'.

To undertake a round-trip walk of up to 120 miles was a collective act of self-sacrifice, made to secure the attention of a political establishment seemingly deaf to their petitions and pleas. It was an act all the more-powerful as it rained heavily throughout most of the pilgrims' journey, whilst many on the march were unemployed and hungry. And the logistics of feeding this assembly almost defeated the organising committee, led by the great factory reformer Richard Oastler.

Why had Richard Oastler had chosen York? It was not just because it was the capital of Yorkshire (whose Ridings were not yet separate parliamentary constituencies or local government authorities). York, and more specifically its Castle Yard (the area between the three sides of the present day museum and courts complex) was the epicentre of Yorkshire politics. At each parliamentary election it was here that voting took place for the MPs who represented the whole County of Yorkshire, preceded by a hustings and followed by a formal proclamation. It was also here that mass political meetings had been held for more than half a century, meetings that developed both the parliamentary reform and anti-slavery campaigns in Yorkshire. Not only the privations of the demonstrators, but the location of their protest, leant the occasion massive symbolic force.

And the occasion had an additional symbolism, both powerful and bitterly poignant. For Oastler's pilgrims gathered close to the spot where, just

nineteen years before, fourteen men from the same area of Yorkshire had been hanged for their part in Luddism, leaving 57 children fatherless. That episode is, of course, a central part of what this lecture series was established to commemorate. Although it is not my purpose to say much specifically about the Luddites here, it is only appropriate that we remember those fourteen men and also the three other Luddites who had been hanged the previous week.

John Batley *Thomas Brook* *Joseph Crowther* *Jonathan Dean*
Joseph Fisher *James Haigh* *William Hartley* *James Hey*
Job Hey *John Hill* *Nathan Hoyle* *George Mellor*
John Ogden *Thomas Smith* *William Thorpe* *John Swallow*
John Walker

It is inconceivable that those who gathered in York Castle Yard under Oastler's leadership in 1832 had forgotten the Luddites. Among those fatigued yet resolute demonstrators there would have been older men who had been Luddites, and younger men and women who were the children of Luddites. And among them were probably some of the 57 sons and daughters whose fathers had been executed outside the Castle walls on 16 January 1813.

And so to my second episode. I want to fast forward a little over a century to January 1917. The scene is Westminster Magistrates Court in London, where the case of Francis Meynell is being considered. Meynell was Quaker and a conscientious objector who was refusing to be conscripted into the army. Like thousands of others of similar views, he faced an indefinite sentence in a military prison. Before the magistrates handed him over to the military, newspapers reported that Meynell told the court proudly: '[my] great-great grandfather's great-great-great grandfather, William Tuke, was imprisoned in York Castle as a conscientious objector in 1660'.

It would be a pleasing symmetry if Francis <u>had</u> been dispatched to York Castle (which had become a military prison in 1900) like William Tuke, but he was not. However, a significant number of conscientious objectors were imprisoned there: they included William Cooper, a future headmaster of the Quaker school at Ackworth, near Pontefract, who was clapped in irons for refusing to carry out rifle drill. Two other Quakers, James and Peter Campbell, were only released from the Castle in April <u>1919</u> after serving three years in various prisons. (When gaoled at Canterbury, Peter had spent time on hunger strike and had been force fed in consequence.)

York Castle was also used to intern Austrian- and German-born Yorkshire residents (mainly from Leeds, Middlesbrough and Sheffield) under the 1914 Aliens Restriction Act, in such quantities that many had to be kept in tents pitched in the Castle precincts. The interned men and women were mainly pork butchers, confectioners and waiters. The early days of the war witnessed extraordinary scenes, not just the well-documented vandalism

directed at the premises of shopkeepers with German names, but also the mass arrest of foreign waiters in coordinated raids on Harrogate hotels by police assisted by local car owners. The 'prisoners of war' (for so they were termed) were then conveyed to York Castle in a convoy of charabancs.

But to return to Francis Meynell. He did not serve his sentence in York. And in a further demonstration that history is never tidy, the 500-odd Quakers who were imprisoned in the Castle in the 1650s and 1660s (many for refusing military service) did not include Meynell's ancestor William Tuke either – though they did briefly include George Fox, the founding figure within Quakerism. But William Tuke, a Quaker blacksmith from the Walmgate area was imprisoned (in fact twice), but not in the Castle. He was incarcerated in the York city prison close to the present day Ousegate bridge. That may have been Tuke's good fortune, for an early eighteenth-century Quaker historian related that 'in York Castle five of the [Quaker] prisoners died through the unhealthiness of the Place, where they were thronged together'. Untidy and tangential though it may seem, this incident helps make an important point, namely that York Castle had a long history – extending over centuries – as a prison for political offenders.

At this juncture it might be helpful to clarify more precisely what is meant by York Castle and to describe briefly its development.

- For present day residents and visitors to the city, York Castle is the name given to the Museum that occupies two very un-castle like buildings at the south-east edge of the city. These buildings originally completely separate, were the county gaol, erected in 1705 and to its left a women's prison built in 1783. Both served all three Yorkshire Ridings, but not the city of York itself, which as we have already seen in the case of the Quaker William Tuke maintained a separate gaol of its own. That there was a completely separate City prison underlines that the Castle area was a special place, governmentally not part of the City at all but owned and controlled by the Crown (it was also an ecclesiastical peculiar, a separate parish whose clergyman answered directly to the monarch, not to the Archbishop of York).

- These buildings seem oddly detached from the sole military structure inside York's city walls, the medieval Cliffords Tower, which now commands the dreary car-park to the north of the Museum.

- To conceptualise the historical York Castle it might be helpful to think of Cliffords Tower as the central keep of a castle whose perimeter curtain wall embraces all of the area currently occupied by the car park, AND all the area occupied by the present day museum PLUS a third eighteenth-century building, the Crown Courts next to them – built as the Assize Courts for the whole of the county of Yorkshire in 1777.

- It is a huge site and even by York's standards its archaeology is hugely complex. Richard Oastler led his Easter Pilgrims into the area now surrounded by the museum and Courts and known as the Eye of York. The three eighteenth-century buildings defined, a profoundly political space. But you might reasonably ask why were the factory reform pilgrims not also spread over the area that is now the car park?

- The answer is that there was a third prison complex, now entirely demolished but one that occupied the greater part of the Castle Yard. It was under construction in 1832 but already it must have totally dominated the site: It's a classic Panopticon with four wings radiating out from a massive circular administrative hub. In adopting the Panopticon design, the authorities were seeking to construct the ultimate disciplinary institution. It allowed for the constant possibility of observation. The most important feature of the Panopticon was that prisoners could never be sure whether they were being observed at any one moment and were thus conditioned onto disciplining themselves.

- At the same time the entire Castle site was completely walled off. A massive gatehouse was the only break in an imposing perimeter wall, over fifteen metres high and two metres wide at its base. It took ten years to construct and was finally completed in 1836 at a total cost of £194,428 (roughly £227M in present day values). This building was not mere political statement: it was intimidatory, oppressive, overwhelming.

- One final point in this sketch of how York Castle Prison looked from the 1830s: the execution site. Until 1802 all executions took place on the Knavesmire, close to York Racecourse. Public hangings were hugely popular occasions and in 1802, to minimise the risk of public disorder as the condemned were taken the 1½ miles from the Castle to the Knavesmire, executions were relocated to the Castle itself. This illustration is from a halfpenny ballad sheet printed soon after the Castle was first used for hangings. There is no detailed contemporary view of the execution site; nor does it appear clearly in any early photographs (it was in use until the 1868). In a conjectural view of the site, drawn in 1858 as it might have been seen from a hot-air balloon, the execution site is obscured from view. Today the site is highly visible, but completely unmarked and almost as completely ignored.

To return to the 1832 Easter Pilgrimage. The knowledge that this was to conclude close to the site of the 1813 Luddite executions infused the occasion with considerable solemnity. The remarkable Rastrick Banner, carried on the Pilgrimage and now preserved in the Tolson Museum vividly conveys this in the contrasting messages on its front:

We hate Tyranny and Oppression

And on its reverse:

> OASTLER *is our* Champion/ The TEN Hours BILL/ And We are Determined to have it.

But there was yet a further dimension to Oastler's Easter Pilgrimage, because it concluded literally in the shadow of the half-finished prison building, as it was being erected for the incarceration NOT of local offenders but of those whom the State defined as Yorkshire's most serious criminals. The repressive apparatus of the State had not receded during the twenty years that separated Luddism from the factory reform movement: it was visibly increasing. And yet at the same time, the State was refusing all pleas that it should intervene to improve the conditions in which some of its youngest and most vulnerable subjects were forced to earn their living. The choice of York Castle as the place to which the Factory Movement Pilgrims marched at Easter 1832 was freighted with significance and not intended to associate it with past glories and the political establishment, but to commemorate the Luddites and to make a gesture of silent defiance at the development of the State.

Michel Foucault, the great French philosopher and historian, argued in his 1975 book *Discipline and Punish* that the 18th- and 19th-century State created 'docile bodies', ideal for the modern industrial age. But, to construct docile bodies the State required disciplinary institutions capable of constantly observing the bodies they control as well as creating the conditions for self-regulation and discipline. This function was exemplified, Foucault argues, by the architectural principles of the *Panopticon*. The history of the Castle Prison in the first half of the nineteenth century is an exemplar of what Foucault argued. The history of York Castle is therefore a complex one, physically and conceptually.

Physically, the building that will now be referred to uncomplicatedly as 'the Castle prison', occupied a variety of sites within the precincts of York Castle. The first mention of the Castle being used as a gaol is as early as 1205. On the instructions of King John, it was to York that Irish hostages seized in the monarch's campaign to pacify Ireland were sent. These were the first recorded political prisoners gaoled there, and the prison was specially fitted out with leg irons for the purpose. In 1295 a total of 75 Welshmen who had participated in an uprising led by Madog ap Llewellyn, against Edward III, were sent there. Ten served-out their sentences at York, the remainder were sent to the King's other castles in the North – Richmond, Scarborough, Skipton, Carlisle and Newcastle. The early fourteenth century saw large numbers of Scottish hostages, seized in border wars, arriving; during the French wars of the early fifteenth century Parisian notables were imprisoned. All of these were probably kept in the building we know as Cliffords Tower, for when the mainly Norman castle was demolished later in the fifteenth century this Tower was specifically spared because of its importance as a prison.

Not all its prisoners were exotic foreigners. The Lord Mayor of York himself was gaoled there in 1580 for refusing to enforce – or even proclaim – penalties against Roman Catholics. He joined a small number of Roman Catholics already imprisoned in the Castle. To be a Catholic in Elizabethan England was, of course, a highly political act. Catholic recusancy was especially politically sensitive in Yorkshire, the centre of the popular rising in 1536 against Henry VIII's break with Rome, customarily known as the Pilgrimage of Grace. Robert Aske, the principal leader of the Pilgrimage was hanged at York Castle in 1537 and his body left to rot there in chains.

When the Castle was rebuilt as a military fortification in the 1640s the prison was moved out of Cliffords Tower and relocated elsewhere in the precinct. It would have been here that the 500 Quaker prisoners mentioned earlier were incarcerated. They were not alone: a wide range of prisoners – many of them essentially political offenders – were housed here during the years of the English Revolution. For example William Archer of Etton, near Beverley, was gaoled in 1652 for 'saying the Parliament were traitors and bloodsuckers and that they had taken off the King's head'. And after the monarchy was restored James Parker of Rothwell (between Wakefield and Leeds) was locked up in 1663 for stating: 'I served Oliver [Cromwell] seven years as a soldier … As for the King I am not beholden to him. I care not a fart for him'.

Parker was one of many Parliamentarian sympathisers from the West Riding who were imprisoned as a result of a series of little known Northern Risings to overthrow the restored monarchy in the autumn of 1663. Of more than a 100 who were directly implicated in the rising, all were remanded to the Castle and tried at the York Assizes. Sixteen were then hung, drawn and quartered on the Knavesmire on <u>16th January 1664</u>. Three others were hanged where they were arrested at Chapeltown in Leeds a few days later; twenty-nine more were sentenced to indefinite prison sentences. Virtually all those executed as a result of the Farnley Wood Rising (as it was popularly known) came from the Yorkshire textiles district. Their decapitated heads were displayed all round York's city walls.

So, history is tidy and symmetrical after all. Sixteen men of the West Riding clothing district were executed at York on Saturday the <u>16th of January</u> 1664, and fourteen men of the West Riding clothing district were executed at York on the Saturday <u>16th of January</u> 1813. Was the choice of the latter date made with the executions 139 years before in mind? Apparently not. It seems to have been a macabre coincidence, one that underlines the frequency with which York Castle functioned as a prison for political offenders, and the City as the site for mass execution. The proceedings in 1813, both before and at the scaffold, offer no hint that anyone involved was aware of the anniversary. When the first group of Luddites Ogden, Hoyle, Crowther, Hill, Walker, Dean, and Brook) were led to the scaffold they all sung a hymn <u>not</u> by any

seventeenth-century Puritan author by Samuel Wesley, the father of the founder of Methodism John Wesley:

> Behold the Saviour of Mankind,
> Nail'd to the shameful tree;
> How vast the love that him inclin'd
> To bleed and die for me.

And the second group who went to the same fate ninety minutes after the bodies of the first seven had been cut down sung, according to the *Leeds Intelligencer*, the same hymn:

> But soon He'll break death's envious chain,
> And in full glory shine.
> O Lamb of God, was ever pain,
> Was ever love, like Thine?

There was no mention of the mass executions of sixteen West Riding textile workers at York in 1664. The *York Herald* was very clear: the fourteen Luddites, 'unfortunate and misguided men, are the largest number that ever suffered in one day at York, that stands upon any record within our knowledge'. To reinforce this point, the *Herald* detailed the eighteenth-century mass executions that had cast a dark shadow of their own across the city: all were political and all derived from the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion. On 1 November 1746 ten Jacobites were hanged at the Tyburn on the Knavesmire, and their hearts removed while they hanged and burnt on the scaffold. The following Saturday eleven more were similarly dispatched. The decapitated heads of all those executed were displayed across the city, the last offenders in Britain to be treated to this ignominy. The remainder of their corpses are thought to have been buried in the Castle precinct, where twenty mutilated skeletons were discovered in the 1860s by labourers digging a drain.

The special assize assembled at York to try these Jacobites was highly unusual. The sixty Jacobite prisoners from the earlier, and less-serious, rising of 1715 had eventually been released without trial. But in 1746, the five judges were joined by the Archbishop and the Dean of York Minster plus the Yorkshire political magnate the Marquis of Rockingham. Archbishop Thomas Herring had taken a leading role in stirring the City to prepare itself militarily to resist the Jacobite army, personally addressing a county meeting in the Castle Yard at which £31,000 was pledged to the defence of England. (Notice the frequency with which not only the prison, but the Castle generally, its precincts and its Yard crop up in this survey: York Castle was a profoundly political space.)

By 1746 the built environment of the Castle had begun a fundamental change. The first of the current buildings, now part of the modern museum, dates from 1701-05, but it proved completely inadequate when the Castle was swamped with Jacobite prisoners. 190 were consigned here after the fall of Carlisle alone, including nine 'rebel bitches' who arrived in January 1746 after a forced march across the Pennines. Even the unflinching loyalist Archbishop Herring was appalled by their condition, telling a friend that their 'Filth and Sickness and close confinement' might 'breed a contagion very dangerous to the publick'. With no public funds to keep the prisoners in cloths, heat or food, the Keeper of York Castle was reduced to appealing for charitable donations through the pages of the *York Courant*, the city's newspaper at the time. Only the women and those male Jacobite prisoners with private means appear to have been kept in the County Gaol. The rest were incarcerated in a small range of cells intended for prisoners on-trial, beneath the Grand Jury House that occupied the site of the present Court building. An unspecified number died in the Grand Jury House, and according to one eye-witness, 'when the turnkey opens the cells in the morning, the steam and stench is intolerable and scarce credible. The very walls are covered with lice in the room over which the Grand Jury sit'. As a result the routine Assize that Easter had to relocate to the other side of the city. A large number of prisoners were removed to gaols at Lincoln and Pontefract, and 70 (including several of 'the rebel bitches') were transported to North America.

Of the 250-odd Jacobite rebels imprisoned at York at its peak, less than a tenth were executed. The real force of Britain's capital punishment regime derived as much from the theatrical display of almost random clemency towards those sentenced to die as it did from public executions themselves: John Jellons, one of those condemned to die, was actually being dragged along the street out of the Castle, bound to a wooden hurdle as was customary at the execution of traitors, when a court official stepped forward with his pardon. The majority were eventually acquitted, or the charges against them were dropped, or they pressed into the Hanoverian army.

Inevitably the story of political imprisonment at York Castle evolved further during the years of the French Revolutionary Wars, though there were no mass incarcerations on the scale of 1746. The most celebrated of the political prisoners of this era was James Montgomery, owner and editor of Sheffield's radical newspaper the *Iris*. In January 1795 he was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for publishing a seditious poem celebrating the fall of the Bastille. The following year he served six months at York for malicious libel, made in reporting 'Sheffield's Peterloo', when soldiers from a patriotic Volunteer Regiment fired on a demonstration on 4 August 1795. The first of these sentences only radicalised Montgomery further, but the second broke his spirit and the *Sheffield Iris* became little more than a shadow of its former self. This, it later became clear, was the intention behind the prosecutions which were instigated by the government as part of a general policy to contain radical political societies in Sheffield. In 1839 the offices of

the local lawyer who had prosecuted James Montgomery relocated to new premises in Sheffield and the original briefs for the prosecution were discovered in papers left behind. They had been sent direct from the Attorney General, and endorsed 'this prosecution is carried on chiefly with a view to put a stop to the Associated Clubs in Sheffield; and it is to be hoped, if we are fortunate enough to succeed in convicting the prisoner, it will go a great way towards curbing the insolence they have uniformly manifested'. York Castle Prison's close association with exemplary sentences passed with broader ideological intentions in mind continued.

While in prison James Montgomery wrote a collection of poems, Prison amusements which he published under the pseudonym of Paul Positive in 1797. The first of these verses concerned a Robin that, Montgomery claimed, visited each day through the open bars of his prison cell: 'Robin! How I envy thee, / Happy child of Liberty'. Largely forgotten as a poet, Montgomery is however, the author of one poem still in common circulation, the carol *Angels from the realms of glory*.

To return to the Luddite executions. It is clear from the *York Herald* in 1813 that the memory of the Jacobite executions (less than seventy years before) was still green when the Luddites met their death. Conditions inside the prison had not much improved, though overcrowding at 1746 levels was never repeated. In 1780 the penal reformer John Howard found that prisoners were not permitted fires to warm them in winter, or direct access to fresh water, baths or beds other than those made on the floor. The following year coals for heating were at last provided, but only as the result of a charitable bequest made by a York widow, Tabitha Bower. By the time the Luddites were incarcerated in the Castle, there was a water pump in the exercise yard, and prisoners were provided with blankets and even soap. But an 1818 visitor commented that, despite 'the handsome and extensive building', the prison inside was dirty, and food and clothing inadequate. Prisoners had to share beds and were chained at all times when not allowed in the exercise yard. Above all they suffered from 'want of inspection, want of instruction, [and]want of employment'. After the 1813 executions, it was in these conditions that a further 48 Luddites remained to serve-out their prison sentences.

Routine chaining was abandoned only in 1836 when all prisoners except those gaoled as debtors were transferred to the new building. There was, however, something of a sea-change in official attitudes in England to political crimes and industrial protesters following the 1813 trials and executions. Thus in 1820 the carefully choreographed theatricality which had attended the trials of Jacobites and Levellers was largely absent during the trial at York of Henry Hunt and the other organisers of the 1819 protest meeting in Manchester remembered as the Peterloo Massacre. Indeed the theatricality of 1820 derived from the behaviour of the defendants who had been bailed pending their trial. Hunt's journey on horseback into York, in the words of the *Leeds Mercury*, 'more resembled the triumphal march of a conqueror than the

journey of a culprit advancing to trial'; even his nine co-defendants who made the journey on foot were accompanied by 140 witnesses for the defence and numerous supporters in a procession that, halting the night in Leeds, must have presaged the 1832 Easter Factory Reform Pilgrimage. The journey to York of the prosecution witnesses, however, were repeatedly interrupted and they were 'assailed with hisses, groans & imprecations'. Rather than risk anything like the same reception, the trial judges took a circuitous route to the city.

Though it ended in the conviction of Hunt and four others among the defendants, the Peterloo trial was also notable for the government privately expressing grave doubts about the preparedness of a Yorkshire jury to declare a guilty verdict. In the seven years since the Luddite risings, it was if England had crossed a Rubicon. Those in authority could no longer be unwavering in their confidence that public attitudes to judicial retribution would be ones of unqualified approval. This was abundantly evident in the other political trials that took place at York in 1820. The first was of West Riding blanket weavers for wage riots in February. Cavalry had been needed to clear the streets of Dewsbury. Sixteen weavers were arrested and immediately sent to York Castle. At the ensuing Assize they pleaded guilty to a variety of public order and violence-related offences. However, in a carefully stage-managed proceeding, the prosecution declined to move for them to be sentenced and the judge instead delivered a stern homily. Forcibly to seek a rise in wages, he told them, was 'an offence of very great magnitude, but it is also an act of the greatest folly and imprudence, to seek by rioting the redress of any imaginary or even real grievance … Go home and be good men.'

There's no space here to analyse the motives behind this exhibition of clemency, except to say that during the early months of 1820 the government was struggling to contain an unprecedented level of political unrest, the most striking example of which was the so-called Cato Street conspiracy in London to assassinate the entire Cabinet. Rather than prosecute all those implicated in conspiracies, the government preferred to keep the extent of its political surveillance networks a secret and portrayed the Cato Street conspirators as murderous psychopaths, acting alone. It then engineered pragmatic displays of clemency elsewhere.

The wisdom of this policy was evident when, over Easter 1820, there were attempts at general risings in West Yorkshire and central Scotland. There were clear links between the two: indeed the Scottish rebels' declaration that they felt "compelled, from the extremity of our sufferings … to take up ARMS for the redress of our *Common Grievances*" was the joint work of Glasgow radicals and Joseph Brayshaw, a Leeds schoolmaster and cobbler's son. The specifically Yorkshire rebels who were arrested (25, all from the Huddersfield area) were imprisoned in York Castle and tried at a special Assize, like the Luddites before them. But this time the Crown prosecutors offered clemency in return for guilty pleas. With the fate of the Luddites doubtless on their minds,

all twenty-five complied. Death sentences were still handed down at the Assize, but each was qualified by a statement that they would be commuted to transportation. And only twelve were actually sent to Australia, the remainder eventually being pardoned or discharged.

The Crown carefully avoided making martyrs of the Yorkshire rebels, a mistake manifestly committed in Scotland where trials following the Easter risings imposed twenty-four capital convictions for disturbances in which the only fatality on the government side was a horse. Though most were commuted, three Scottish rebels were hanged, the consequences of which reverberate even through to the present day. Those executions were referenced by Scottish political radicals from the 1832 Reform Crisis, through Chartism, the agitations around the second and third reform acts (1867 and 1884), and the emergence of Scottish nationalism from the 1880s. Monuments to their memory remain sites of potent political significance and the 1820 martyrs have been the occasion of debate in the Edinburgh Parliament several times in recent years. But contemporary opinion around the 1820 risings in Yorkshire was that the treatment of those convicted of treason was pragmatic and prudential rather than merciful and magnanimous. We should note, however, that it was soon after the trials of the 1820 rebels that discussions about physically transforming and extending the Castle Prison began. The decision to proceed with the astonishing new prison building was then taken in 1823. Luddism and the 1820 Yorkshire Risings were a critical part of the context to this decision to extend the Castle Prison so.

The use of the Castle Prison for those sentenced in consequence of politically motivated prosecutions continued unabated until the late 1840s. Part of the wider context, essential to understanding why popular political opinion was so restive, are the notorious Six Acts passed at the end of 1819 that remained in force until 1836. This repressive legislation severely curtailed freedom of political speech and assembly and, while the application of most of the acts was relaxed after 1821, the laws that made the publication of newspapers prohibitively expensive (in order to limit the circulation of political news and comment to the working classes) was enforced with increasing strictness from 1830. There seems to have been a steady stream of prisoners prosecuted for selling unstamped newspapers until the stamp act was repealed in 1836. The American socialist John Francis Bray, once a printer here in Huddersfield working on the great unstamped paper *Voice of the West Riding*, moved to York in 1833. He later recalled how, almost daily, he would visit printers and booksellers serving out sentences in the Castle for dealing in the unstamped. Many of them were in prison on the debtors' side, not criminal or technically political prisoners at all; but they had been imprisoned for debt after completing their criminal sentences, their businesses ruined during their initial term of imprisonment. Unstamped vendors imprisoned at York included Joshua Hobson (one of Huddersfield's most notable sons), who served two gaol sentences there in 1835 and 1836 for selling unstamped papers from his office

in Briggate, Leeds. Another Briggate newsvendor, recently widowed Alice Mann, refused a prosecution offer to drop all but one of the five charges against her if she promised to stop selling unstamped papers. Alice argued that her newsagency was the only means she had to maintain her family. The offer was made no less than four times during her trial, and on refusing a fourth time she was fined £100 and, unable to pay this, immediately committed to York Castle for six months.

In both 1840 and 1848 significant numbers of Chartists were conveyed to York following major riots in Bradford. And in the summer of 1842 a wave of mass strikes, which included obtaining the People's Charter among their aims, hit the West Riding. In consequence the Castle was so crammed with prisoners remanded in custody for trial that the North Yorkshire Militia had to be called out to assist in maintaining security.

York achieved its greatest notoriety as a prison for Chartists in 1840-41 when its inmates included the highest-profile of all Victorian political prisoners, Feargus O'Connor, the one really commanding national figure in the great civil rights movement we call Chartism. He was also the presiding genius of the movement's great newspaper, the *Northern Star* and was imprisoned for criticisms of the hated New Poor Law published in its pages.) It is a tribute to the need to ensure O'Connor did not die in custody and become a martyr to the cause that the Crown permitted him his own clothes and furniture, a fire in his cell, meals brought in from local hotels, writing materials and a cage-bird for company. O'Connor's release from prison in August 1841 was the occasion for one of York's greatest ever political demonstrations.

However, O'Connor's experience contrasted sharply with that of other York Chartist prisoners. Handloom weaver Peter Hoey of Barnsley lost a leg after being chained in custody and Samuel Holberry of Sheffield died here after a long struggle to overcome tuberculosis, contracted in Northallerton Gaol where he had first been imprisoned. Holberry had led been arrested as he was about to lead an uprising in Sheffield in January 1840. Young, idealistic, unemployed with a bride of fifteen months expecting their first child, Holberry cut a sympathetic figure. Asked 'surely you would not take a life?' by the policeman who arrested him, he responded, 'But I would, in defence of liberty and the [People's] Charter. Mind, I am no thief or robber, but I will fight for the Charter and will not rest until we have got it, and to that I have made up my mind'.

Unlike Chartist rebels in Wales a few months before, only a lesser charge of seditious conspiracy was brought against Holberry at the York Assize. Holberry received a four-year sentence, eight other conspirators lesser terms. But all were led away to Northallerton prison. It was selected by the judge on the instructions of the Home Office because of all the prisons within the York's jurisdiction, Northallerton 'was farthest away from their own homes' and the gaol where prisoners 'are worse fed & hardest worked'.

Northallerton gaol was run in a spirit of viciousness and parsimony unusual even by the standards of the time: solitary confinement was the only alternative to hard labour or the treadmill. After one Sheffield Chartist died there and Holberry had contracted TB, the Home Office had him transferred to York Castle where medical supervision of prisoners was routine. According to the surgeon who examined him soon after his arrival he was bilious, 'weak; his skin and eyes are still suffused with bile; his pulse is quick and his appetite bad'. Edward Burley, a plasterer and York Chartist who often visited Holberry, found him unable to exercise or even walk. By March 1841 he could no longer hold a pen. York's Chartists led what soon became a national agitation for Holberry's release on compassionate grounds. On 17 June release was offered in return for two sureties, each of £100. His supporters were still desperately trying to secure these when Holberry died. The York Chartists strenuously argued prison conditions were to blame but the coroner's court exonerated the authorities.

The belief that Holberry and other Chartists were political prisoners endured. The Marquis of Normanby, Home Secretary at the time Holberry was gaoled, was still being criticised as late as the 1860s for permitting Chartist prisoners to be treated 'worse than thieves, burglars, and even murderers'. The allegations were made with some justification for, as a major North Riding landowner and magistrate, Normanby would have had local knowledge of Northallerton's regime. Not only was the Home Office less than fastidious in checking smaller prisons, the correspondence just quoted shows the government to have been directly complicit in Holberry's mistreatment.

Chartists were the last political prisoners to be held in York Castle until the so-called 'aliens' and conscientious objectors during the First World War. One might expect perhaps to find Irish Fenians prisoners but this seems not to have been the case: at the time of the Fenian outrages of the 1860s in London and Manchester, disturbances in Yorkshire were limited to Teesside and those committed for trial or sentenced to gaol were sent to Durham or Northallerton. Such was the sea-change in West Yorkshire popular politics that when Bradford magistrates recruited special constables in anticipation of Fenian disturbances in 1868, among those they recruited was the blacksmith Isaac Jefferson who – under the alias of Wat Tyler – had led the 1848 Bradford Chartist riots. The only "political" incarcerations at York in the 1860s bordered on the ridiculous compared with two decades before: two witnesses remanded to York for refusing to give evidence before a Parliamentary Enquiry into election corruption at Beverley in 1868.

How to conclude? Nobody could claim, even in West Yorkshire, that Luddism has similar traction in contemporary English politics as the insurrection of 1820 does in Scotland. Meanwhile the role of York Castle as the site of the Luddite executions was completely forgotten until York's Alternative History Group organised a commemorative meeting and march on the 200th anniversary of the Luddite executions in 2013. And as you can see we were

not exactly mob-handed. Now the execution site is very nearly forgotten once again: the placards the Alternative History Group erected at the execution site lasted a little over a week before they were vandalised and then removed.

It is has been the ambiguous fate of Yorkshire's capital to become one of Britain's principal tourist centres. And although there is seemingly no limit to tourists' appetite for the criminal and the macabre, it is Dick Turpin the highwayman (a romantic way of saying armed robber and murderer) who is revered and whose grave has become a tourist attraction.

Perhaps this is as it should be: very few would wish the Luddites to be included in the displays of the York Dungeon, one of the city's most popular tourist attractions. Located in a decommissioned Victorian police station completely unconnected to York Castle, the Dungeon, advertises itself as:

> The story of York's darkest history … based on real history (minus the boring bits) where you come face to face with York's gruesome past … come into the darkness of the Castle Prison, York, and hear the tale of the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin … experience Turpin's final moments and … how it feels to be hung!

I venture to suggest that Dick Turpin is just about the least interesting or important prisoner ever to have been executed in the city's history. Episodic and sketchy though this lecture has had to be, I hope to have succeeded in showing how for over 800 years York Castle was consistently the principal place outside of London for political imprisonments, trials and executions. York Castle was a profoundly political and emotional space, one of the country's largest and architecturally most-imposing prisons, and both the symbolic and practical centre of political authority in the region.

So finally, let us return to where we began: in York Castle Yard in 1832 and the great Factory Reform 'Pilgrimage'. We should see this epoch-defining event in the evolution of Yorkshire political protest as an act of reclamation. Industrial workers, many of them from the same communities that had mobilised for Luddism and which had seen seventeen of their members sent to the scaffold, reclaimed and cleansed a place that had been so contaminated nineteen years before. The Luddites had been imprisoned, tried and then executed at a location freighted with reminders of the authority of the State. The City of York and its Castle, were themselves powerful players in the tragic drama that this evening's lecture commemorates. Half a century after E.P. Thompson famously pledged 'to rescue the Luddite cropper … from the enormous condescension of posterity', a great deal still remains to be achieved.