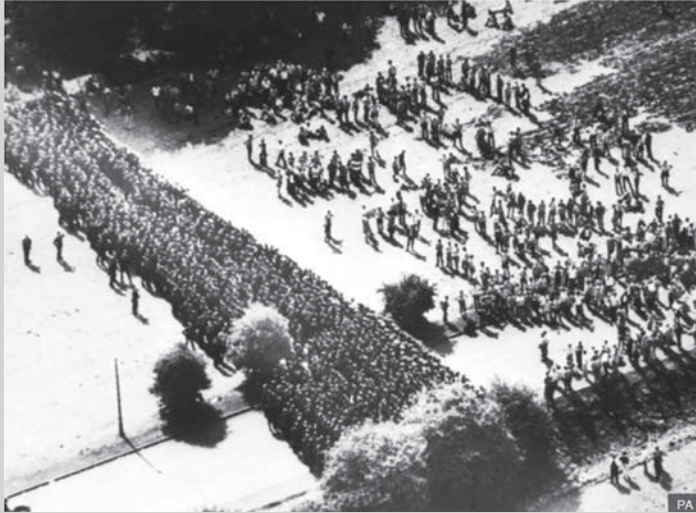


From Jarrow to Orgreave

By Dave Temple



Massed ranks of 6,000 police face pickets at Orgreave Cokeworks June 18th 1984

Cabinet papers from 1984 have confirmed what most miners always knew – that Thatcher and McGregor consistently lied about their real intention to destroy the British coalmining industry.

Further revelations now inform us of another unsurprising fact that Leon Brittan decreed that there should never be an inquiry into the state's organised campaign of violence

against striking miners during the conflict. The Tories and New Labour have duly obliged.

Nowhere was the violence more extreme than on June 18th 1984, at the Orgreave Coke Works near Sheffield when 6,000 police, a company of police "cavalry" and a contingent of dog handlers faced 8,000 unarmed miners in a confrontation that has been likened to a mediaeval battle.

Throughout that morning, mounted police sallied forth, long staves in hand, to charge into the crowds of miners breaking heads and limbs. Inevitably, faced with this unwarranted provocation some pickets retaliated and threw stones.

Left: Cavalry charging pickets



Finally, the full 6,000 charged scattering miners who, in fear of their lives, sought the relative sanctuary of the nearby village. A total of 95 miners were arrested and charged with riot, a serious offence carrying a life sentence.

When the first batch of 39 came to trial, the lawyers for the defence proved that the evidence of the arresting officers had been fabricated. Many of the statements contained identical sentences, dictated by senior officers.

Some arresting officers were proven not to have been at Orgreave at the time they were supposed to have made arrests. What emerged was a conspiracy not of the miners or their union but of the government, the NCB and the forces of the law. But, this incident was only an extreme example of what had become daily life in the coalfields of Britain during the dispute.

When Leon Brittan ruled that there should never be an enquiry into the policing of the miners' strike he was just the last of a long line of home secretaries who have, over the years, conspired to deny the mining communities of Britain justice. This denial of justice is etched into the collective memory of Durham's mining families and recorded on our banners.

None more so than the events of 1832. After the repeal of the anti-trade union Combination Acts in 1825, trade unions achieved a measure of legality that was immediately welcomed by the pitmen of Northumberland and Durham.

They transformed their hitherto illegal brotherhood into a legitimate union and published a list of demands and

there was much to change. Pitmen were tied to the mine in a form of serfdom known as the bond.

This required a miner to sign, or more commonly, put his mark, on a complicated agreement determining the terms of their employment for one year. The terms of the bond allowed the owners to pay wages, not in "the coin of the realm", but in tokens that could only be redeemed for overpriced shoddy goods and inferior food in the owners' stores known as "Tommy Shops".

Once signed this bond was enforceable by law and any pitman who left the colliery without his master's "letter of leave" could be hunted down and thrown into jail.

Pitmen and their families were housed in insanitary tied cottages from which they could be evicted at the whim of the master. Such was the power of the owners that they forced families to give up their children as infants to work in the darkness of the mine. It was not uncommon for children as young as six to be working for 16 hours a day as trapper boys opening and shutting ventilation doors.

Trapper boy



Before the bonding day of 1831, the pitmen of The Great Northern Coalfield could bear their conditions no longer and held a series of big meetings where they pledged to refuse the bond and to stay loyal to the union.

Thomas Hepburn, a Primitive Methodist preacher and a hewer at Hetton colliery, emerged as their undisputed leader. Hepburn, on the death of his father in a pit accident, had started work at the age of eight. He was one of the more literate miners and a passionate advocate of education and the establishment of libraries in each village.

Pitmen refuse to be bound

When the pitmen of the two counties refused to be bound they caught owners on the hop. Lord Londonderry had just finished building his new port at Seaham Harbour and was heavily in debt to London bankers. To avoid bankruptcy, he settled on the men's terms, much to the disgust of his fellow mine owners. When the



*Charles Vane 3rd Marquess
of Londonderry*

union allowed Londonderry's collieries to reopen, on the understanding that the pitmen would give half their earnings to the unbound men, the resolve of the other owners collapsed and, by August, the pitmen of Northumberland and Durham celebrated a stunning victory improving their conditions and reducing the working day for boys under ten to 12 hours.

However, by the end of the year, the owners were conspiring to smash the union. As bonding day approached the following year, the union made further demands as their price for agreeing to be bound but the owners refused to compromise. When bonding day passed on April 5th and only a handful of men had signed the bond the owners, now reunited, refused to bind any man who refused to desert the union.

Soldiers were rushed into the two counties, special constables were sworn in and "candy men" recruited from the slums of Newcastle and Sunderland. Candyman, a local name for a rag-and-bone man, was a derogatory term given to thugs who were used as muscle to evict pitmen and their families from their tied cottages.

Evictions begin

The evictions began on April 21st in the mining village of Hetton-le-Hole.

A contingent of Metropolitan police was drafted into the village assisted by special constables and a contingent of the Queen's Bays cavalry. Only ten men out of the 1,200 employed at Hetton colliery had agreed to be bound and they were issued with pistols and muskets for their own protection.



Hetton Colliery

Despite this provocation, the evictions proceeded all day relatively peacefully. However, at 1.30 am the next morning, a bound man called Errington, formerly a prominent leader of the union, was found shot dead and ten men were immediately arrested and charged with his murder.

The *Durham Advertiser* was scathing in its denunciation of the “assassination” which was “so derogatory to the character of the Englishman”.

They were even more concerned at the way Errington’s funeral cortège was treated: “We are horror struck when we relate that when the funeral procession passed down through Easington Lane the people there assembled, saluted it with groans and hisses, and that on its arrival at the Four Lane Ends near Hetton-le-Hole a number of pitmen rushed from a public house, kept by a person named Lamb, and gave three loud huzzars!”

However, it later transpired that far from an assassination it was more like a gunfight at the OK Corral.

It emerged that Errington had left the safety of his home in Brick Garth, Easington Lane, armed with a pistol and met another three blacklegs at a

house not far away in Hetton Front Street.

At 11.30pm, the four blacklegs, armed with two pistols, a musket and a sword, stepped out into the street where the evicted miners were camped around their furniture. It was dark and the smoke from the miners’ campfires drifted down

the street.

What happened next was not clear. The only certainty was that Errington was found shot. The evidence as to who fired the first shot, how many shots were fired and where individuals were at the time of the shooting was so conflicted that no one was ever convicted of his murder. The arrested men returned to the village amongst amid great rejoicing and celebration.

Reign of terror

Immediately after Errington’s body was found, the authorities orchestrated a reign of terror. Where more than one or two men gathered together they were arrested and tied up in the colliery stables and workshops. Cutlasses and pistols were thrust in their faces to provoke and intimidate them and men who were active in the union were singled out for special treatment and bound head and foot.

Having finished the evictions at Hetton, the eviction party decamped and headed for the village of Friars Goose on the south bank of the Tyne at Gateshead. Emboldened by their success at Hetton, the candymen became more aggressive, taunting



Contemporary illustration of the Battle of Friars Goose

the pitmen with insults, questioning their manhood and damaging their furniture.

Unable to take any more of this treatment a group of men broke into a house that was being used as a guardhouse and armoury and stole a stash of muskets, powder and shot and rushed to the high ground where they pelted the candymen with a hail of stones and brickbats.

When the special constables fired on their attackers, the miners returned fire with their newly acquired arms wounding a magistrate and several constables. A rider was then sent to the barracks in Newcastle to summon soldiers but by the time they arrived the crowd had dispersed.

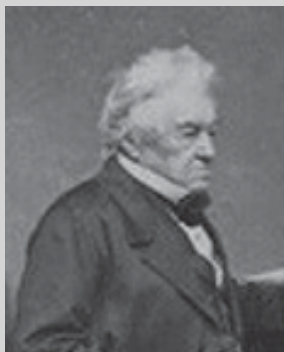
Two union delegates who had returned from a committee meeting and could not have been present at the disturbances were seized, tied to a cart and so badly beaten that they

were barely alive when they finally arrived at Newcastle jail. Others, whether present at the disturbances or not, were rounded up and jailed.

The death of a magistrate

On June 11th, two pitmen, William Jobling and Ralph Armstrong were begging on the banks of the Tyne between South Shields and Jarrow when they met a magistrate named Fairless who was on horseback.

He knew Jobling by sight and he paused to speak. Jobling asked if Fairless would give him money to buy a drink, only to be refused. Armstrong came at Fairless from behind and unseated the magistrate who fell to the ground. Fairless was then taken to a nearby house where he received treatment for his wounds but died ten days later when the gash on his head became inflamed. Jobling was arrested and charged with murder while Armstrong was never found.



Justice James Parke

The murder of Cuthbert Skipsey

On July 8th, an altercation broke out between a number of special constables and striking miners at Chirton pit near North Shields. The constables were escorting blacklegs into the pit when unbound men who had been drinking at Dobson's public house confronted them.

After insults were exchanged, fighting broke out between the striking pitmen and the constables. Cuthbert Skipsey, a well-known and much respected miner from Percy Main, came out of the public house and tried to calm things down.

At one point, he put his hand on the shoulder of special constable George Weddle and was heard to say; "My canny man go about your business and let's have peace and quietness". Weddle turned to him, swore, pushed him away and fired his pistol into Skipsey's chest at close range, killing him instantly.

At the inquest, all the constables gave identical evidence that Skipsey had tried to wrest Weddle's pistol from him. However, the evidence against this account was so overwhelming

that the jury, made up of farmers and tradesmen, recorded a verdict of manslaughter and Weddle was committed for trial at Newcastle Assizes.

Durham Assizes

When Justice James Parke opened the Durham Assizes on July 29th 1832, the Bishop of Durham was seated on the bench in his capacity as Prince Palatine. No miner would take any comfort from his presence because the Dean and Chapter of Durham's Cathedral derived huge profit from the coal trade and, in previous disputes, the Bishop's stables had been used as a convenient place to chain up striking miners.

A Grand Jury was sworn in consisting of 21 of the great and the good including such famous coalowning names as Shafto and Bowes and two of the others were resident in castles. Not the usual collection of farmers and trades people called upon to do jury service.

Two weeks earlier, the Home Secretary, Lord Melbourne, soon to become Queen Victoria's best friend, sent a letter to all magistrates in the northern counties reminding them where their duty lay. He warned

Lord Melbourne





Sketch of William Jobling in Durham jail

them to be “vigilant against violent, unjust, seditious, tumultuous, and inflammatory trade union actions and in doing so affirm where the government’s sympathy would lie.”

Parke was clearly in tune with Melbourne when he gave his opening remarks.

“Almost every act of violence, I believe I may say, directly or indirectly, every act may be attributed to the combinations amongst workmen ...”, he said.

The proliferation of these combinations in Durham he blamed on the repeal of the Combination Laws that “gave permission for workmen to meet together”. This permission, the Judge said, had been “used to excess”.

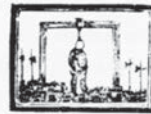
He continued: “Gentlemen those combinations are so dangerous to personal safety, and so injurious to the interests of this great trading community, as well as to the peace and welfare of society, and to none more than the men themselves that sooner or later they must be put down. With this view I rely upon the

vigorous and prompt discharge of their duty by magistrates, jurors and all those to whom is entrusted the administration of the law”.

On Wednesday August 1st, Jobling stood before Justice Parke charged with the murder of Fairless. Witnesses testified that Jobling had approached Fairless in a civil manner and merely asked him for “a drink”. Fairless refused on the grounds that Jobling had already “had enough to drink”. Fairless who knew Jobling by sight asked him his name and Jobling answered him truthfully. Not the actions, it was claimed, of a man about to commit a crime let alone murder.

There was no doubt that Armstrong approached from behind and threw Fairless from his horse but what happened next was contested. The prosecution claimed that Jobling held Fairless down while Armstrong struck him on the head several times. Jobling claimed he ran away and, on looking back, saw Armstrong striking Fairless with a stick.

It was clear that Jobling did not initiate the attack nor had he set out to kill the magistrate. However,



Trial, Sentence, AND **EXECUTION**

of **WILLIAM JOBLING**, who was Executed at Durham, on Friday Morning, August 3rd, 1832, for the Wilful Murder of **NICHOLAS FAIRLESS**, Esq., late Magistrate at South Shields,
On Wednesday morning, August 1st, 1832, the trial of William

Jobling's fate was already sealed because Parke was in no mood for compromise and directed the jury to find him guilty which it did within a few minutes.

It is likely that Jobling's fate had been decided long before the trial, the clue being in the sentence he received. That Jobling was to be hanged was a given. The Assizes had dispatched two men to the hereafter the day before for the lesser crime of burglary. But, for Jobling, Parke added an extra act of brutal vengeance: after death he would be "hung in chains" at the place of his crime.

The barbaric practice of hanging a murderer's body in chains had ceased to be a punishment in England for several decades. The *Durham Advertiser* struggled to recall only four cases of a body being hung in chains, in the northern counties, since the reign of Charles II, the last being in 1770.

Anatomy Bill

Parke could only take such a measure because, just 13 days before the trial, the gruesome practice had been reintroduced into law by the passage of the Anatomy Bill.

This bill was designed to combat the digging up of freshly buried bodies, a practice known colloquially as "Burking" after the notorious Scottish body snatchers Burke and Hare.

Hitherto, only murderers' bodies could be legally sent for medical dissection. The act, however, was introduced to allow anyone – such as the masters of workhouses, who were legally in possession of a dead body – to be able to sell the body to a school of anatomy to be used for scientific purposes.

To remove the stigma that associated dissection with murder, the Bill stated that the practice of sending murderers to be dissected should end. However, at the last minute before the Bill received its third reading, a verbal amendment was proposed by Prime Minister, Lord Grey, to include the ability of a judge to sentence a murderer to be hung in chains or buried at the foot of the scaffold without religious ceremony.

That the Prime Minister would take the time to make this amendment was remarkable. However, he was a Northumberland landowner deeply involved in the coal trade. His oldest daughter, Lady Louisa, was married to none other than the wealthy coalowner John Lambton, 1st Earl of Durham.

At noon on August 3rd, just 48 hours after his trial, William Jobling was hanged outside the County Courts in the City of Durham. The papers reported that there were "not so many in attendance as had been predicted" and the mood was sombre. The *Durham Advertiser* put this down to "The delegates of the Pitmen's Union who have complete control over the simple minds of their infatuated followers."

After his body had been cut down, it was taken away, undressed and coated in tar for its preservation, after which the cloths were replaced.

Trial of George Weddle

On the same day, twenty miles away, at Newcastle Assizes, George Weddle was tried for the manslaughter of Cuthbert Skipsey before Judge Baron Bolland.

After a trial lasting 12 hours, Weddle

was found to be guilty and was sentenced to six months' hard labour. The press reported that there were "expressions of disappointment in the public gallery".

On August 6th, at 7.00am, Jobling's body was taken in a four-wheeled cart, escorted by a troop of Hussars and a company of infantry out of Durham, to Chester-le-Street, Picktree, Sludge Row, Portabello, over Black Fell to White Mare Pool and on to the turnpike road to South Shields.

At Jarrow Slake, the scene of the crime, the gruesome iron harness – with the body of Jobling held within – was suspended from a 20 ft pole erected in the slake 100 yards beyond the high tide mark.

There can be no doubt that the establishment conspired to make an example of Jobling in the hope that it would demoralise those pitmen still holding out against the owners. If there were any doubt that this was the case, what happened next would make it clear.

Midland Assizes

On August 8th, Justice Parke found himself passing judgement on 21-year-old James Cook at the Midland Assizes in Leicester. Cook pleaded guilty to the brutal murder of a Mr Paas and disposing of his body on a fire. When Parke donned the black cap, he must have had in mind the fate he had imposed on Jobling just one week previously.

Conscious of the unfavourable comparison between the nature of the two offences, he could not possibly



Representation of Jobling hanging in chains – Bede Gallery, Jarrow

have given Cook a lesser sentence. He therefore decreed that Cook's body should also be hung in chains.

On Saturday August 10th, Cook was hanged before a crowd of 44,000 in front of Leicester jail. A gibbet was erected on Saffron Lane where, on the afternoon of the following day, his body was suspended in an iron cage... but not for long.

There followed a public outcry throughout the length and breadth of Britain against this "horrid ceremony" and "barbaric act." The *London Courier and Evening Gazette* described gibbeting as a practice "which would disgrace a nation of savages" and wondered how a government could have introduced such an act.

It seems it was one thing to have the decaying body of a Durham pitman to twist on the gibbet in coalowners' country but quite another to have the horrible spectacle enacted in the more genteel surroundings of Leicester.

Home Secretary Lord Melbourne acted swiftly and commuted that part of Cook's sentence that condemned his body to hang in chains. By Tuesday, just three days later the body was removed.

For Jobling, there was no such reprieve. His body hung for a further 18 days until, in the dark night of 31 August, it mysteriously disappeared. Folk memory insists that pitmen came by boat at high tide, cut down the body and buried it at sea. Some speculate that the local authority, embarrassed by the gruesome sight, paid to have the body taken away.

No one was ever hung in chains again in England and that part of the Anatomy Bill was quietly removed two years later.

Whatever the damage done to the morale of the pitmen, the onset of starvation and an outbreak of cholera in the villages drove the men back to work defeated. Hepburn and the leaders were victimised and refused employment.

Justice Parke's career, on the other hand, took off. The following year, in 1833, he was made a Privy Councillor and, in 1844, a Baron of the Exchequer, later becoming Baron Wensleydale of Walton with a life peerage: a meteoric rise for an undistinguished barrister who had not even attained the rank of King's

Counsel before he was elevated to the judiciary.

It would be fanciful to make a direct comparison between the events of 1832 and the Miners' Strike 152 years later. Vindictive as Thatcher was she didn't hang anyone in chains. But, while the two cases differ in degree, in *essence* there is no difference. In both cases parliament and the state used the force of law in an attempt to destroy a trade union.

Just as Jobling was hung in chains to demonstrate the domination of the state over the lower orders, Orgreave was contrived to give the miners a lesson in violence they would never forget. There is no other logical explanation.

For months, striking miners had been prevented from moving about the country by the simple device of erecting roadblocks and denying them the right to travel. It was a violation of their human rights but they did it anyhow.

Yet, on the morning of June 18th when the police stopped the coaches of pickets, it was not to prevent them from reaching their destination but to give them detailed directions of how to get to the Orgreave Cokeworks. Miners were cynically lured into a trap: an ambush, which could only have been organised at the highest level of the Tory government.

That is why Leon Brittan insisted there should never be an inquiry and that is why, no matter how long it takes we will continue to fight for one.