

## The Road to Peterloo

**7. 30 p.m. Sunday 18th August 2019**

Two days after the bi-centenary of the Peterloo Massacre, a large crowd gathered at the Tyneside Irish Centre to remember the murder of 18 innocent people in Manchester, with the help of three singers and musicians; Pete Coe, Brian Peters and Laura Smyth.

The set was deliberately planned so that we would be told about how the elites and authorities had callously created the conditions for the protest and how they had then brutally reacted. The songs in the first half were about the background to Peterloo. We heard about the 'Waterloo Drummer', as it was noted that many musicians took part in the Peterloo protest, musicians who had been in the army before being allowed to take their instruments home. We also heard passionate songs berating the "Tyrants of England", stating that they would get their comeuppance and songs. We also heard songs about the weaving industry and the proliferation what we would now call zero hours contracts in the years after Waterloo.

After a short break came the second half with songs more specifically about Peterloo including biting satire about the spies who were paid by the establishment. As with the first half, it was clear that a lot of effort and time had gone into putting the set together, with much research in archives and places like the Bodleian library. It was explained to us how many of the songs had originally been called broadsides and that many of them had originally been simply named Peterloo! Consequently some were given more original titles... One of these was a bitterly satirical song, contrasting the actions of Yeomen at Waterloo with the 'brave Yeomanry who fought so well' at Peterloo. Another song was about how the magistrates in Manchester were congratulated by the Prince Regent and how in the aftermath of Peterloo, the Six Acts were passed, with attacks on printed publications, with heavy taxation. Taking us past Peterloo itself, there was a song about the Chartists put to a new tune by Laura Smyth.

The last song of the set was aimed at leaving us with cause for optimism. It was

yet another broadside from Manchester about a radical meeting at Kersal Moor in Salford. This provided us with an uplifting end to the concert and a reminder that the struggle for a fairer society went on after Peterloo... and continues through our work today.

Peter Sagar August 2019