

Power Loom Riots

The power loom riots of 1826 were of a much more formidable character than the Shuttle Gathering riots of 1812 and they resulted in the loss of life. The outbreak of the Power Loom Riots occurred on the 23rd April 1826 and during that day and the three succeeding days all the power looms in the area were broken from Edenfield in the South to Burnley in the North and Westward as far as Accrington. The rioters were mostly strangers in the district, at least that is, the ringleaders, as it was the policy of the organisers to detail men to places where they were not known in order to avoid detection. Under the name of the leader rejoicing in the appropriate nick name of "Tackle-ti-mash," the mob swept up the valley destroying the looms on their way from Rawtenstall to Bacup, without hindrance from constables or the military. An eye witness stated that at Waterbarn mill the ringleaders entered the mill and first cut out the warps and destroyed the reeds and healds and then with a few well aimed blows they destroyed the looms. Tunstead Mill was next on the destroyers list. Irwell Mill at Bacup was the next to fall victim to the rioters who then made their way to Mr Munns mill at Irwell Springs.

One eye witness who was at the time of the riots fitting a new pane of glass into one of the front windows of Fern Hill House, home of the then George Ormerod, brother in law to James Whittaker J.P., Broadclough Hall. Mr Whittaker, who as a magistrate was obnoxious to the rioters, was at the time at Fern Hill, and was observing the rioters, from the terrace overlooking the road as they passed from Waterbarn to Bacup. As soon as the ringleaders saw Mr Whittaker they halted and began to hoot and shout. A cry was raised to attack the house and capture the magistrate as a hostage, however this was soon overruled and the mob proceeded on its way to Bacup.

A young man named Isaiah Bowden, a hatter in Bacup, but a native of Oldham, was conspicuous in the attack on Irwell Mill and was afterwards sentenced to transportation for life for aiding and abetting the rioters. Two other Bacupians, a man named Cockerill, and a woman named Betty Cunliffe, who took more subordinate parts in the riots were each sentenced to two years imprisonment for being concerned in the loom breaking. The day after the riot at Bacup, a large mob gathered together and proceeded over the hills to Burnley, where the looms were once again destroyed.

The mob according to a young man who was a witness, was composed mainly of Quarrymen or Brownback's, from Brandwood and Shawforth. Having been piped into Burnley by a young man playing a flute to the tune of "a nutting we will go" the rioters soon dealt with the looms, and also dealt with some men in a foundry who had mistreated a young boy. One publican in Burnley both through fear or good will, trundled a barrel of porter into the street and allowed the thirsty rioters to help themselves. At this time there was of course no police force as we know it today in Bacup for instance there were two or three watchmen of the old "Charley" type. The most conspicuous of these being Long George, or as often pronounced Lung George whose tall ungainly figure was a prominent object in the streets of Bacup. When the rioters arrived in Bacup George and his other watch brothers, Bill o'th Loin, Jim Blacksmith, and Long Sam kept out of the way

