



Open Research Online

Citation

Flatman, Christopher John (2020). The Origins of the Riots in Littleport and Ely in May 1816 and the Reaction of the Establishment to the Disturbances. Student dissertation for The Open University module A826 MA History part 2.

URL

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/70449/>

License

(CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0) Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Policy

This document has been downloaded from Open Research Online, The Open University's repository of research publications. This version is being made available in accordance with Open Research Online policies available from [Open Research Online \(ORO\) Policies](#)

Versions

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding

**The Origins of the Riots in Littleport and Ely in May 1816
and the Reaction of the Establishment to the Disturbances.**

Christopher John Flatman

BA Hons Psychology (Portsmouth)

A dissertation submitted to The Open University

for the degree of

MA in History

January 2020

WORD COUNT: 15,941

Abstract.

In May 1816 labourers in Littleport and Ely in Cambridgeshire rioted, demanding higher wages and a reduction in the price of flour. This study asks why the labourers rioted and why the local and national authorities reacted in the manner that they did to the disturbances. It examines the details of the riots and their suppression in their historical context before proceeding to consider the ensuing trials and punishments. Finally, the study explores local and national reactions in the aftermath of the events and considers their legacies.

Following a review of evidence from contemporary accounts, trial papers, correspondence and newspaper coverage, the study concludes that the rioters were motivated in part by a reaction to genuine economic hardship and a desire to negotiate a fair rate of pay and food prices according to traditional social conventions. There were, however, also elements of opportunism as the perpetrators sought to settle personal grudges against specific individuals. Local magistrates, having little option, initially responded with conciliation, but once military assistance arrived the central authorities were quick to restore order in a brutal manner designed to deter any further potential rioters. The rapidly convened Special Assizes and the public executions which followed were specifically intended as a visible expression of the power of the Crown in order to re-impose order and control, both locally and nationally. Countrywide reactions were overwhelmingly supportive of the authorities and are indicative of a national fear of faceless agitators and potential rebellion. Local opinion, however, certainly once the immediate danger had passed, was more sympathetic to the plight of the labourers and suggests a desire to rebuild a peaceful community.

Contents.

	Page
1. Introduction	1
2. The Riots and Their Suppression	16
3. The Trials	33
4. Aftermath and Legacies	45
5. Conclusion	57
Bibliography	61

Personal Statement.

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work and that I have not submitted it, or any part of it for a degree at The Open University or at any other university or institution. Parts of this dissertation are built on work that I submitted for assessment as part of A825.

Acknowledgements.

I would like to thank Dr Rachel Duffett for her invaluable advice, support and encouragement in supervising this dissertation. I would also like to thank the staff of the Cambridgeshire Archives and the Cambridge University Archives for their assistance and my work colleagues at Ely Cathedral for their interest and encouragement. Finally, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the tireless patience and support of my partner Ian.

Chapter 1: Introduction.

This study considers the events, background and motives surrounding the Littleport and Ely riots of 1816 and the reaction of the Establishment, both locally and nationally, to the unrest. The main research questions are: ‘Why did the people of Littleport and Ely riot in May 1816?’ and ‘Why did the authorities react to the disturbances in the way that they did?’ The study draws on multiple themes: Crime and punishment, considering the purpose of the trial and sentences; Poverty and welfare, reflecting on poor relief in the area; and Religion, exploring the role of church representatives as victims and judges.

The dissertation is structured chronologically to consider from primary source evidence and contemporary accounts what happened at each stage of the events and the possible reasons why. Chapter two focusses on the riots, the initial reaction of the authorities and their rapid suppression. Chapter three examines the trials and punishments. Chapter four considers the aftermath and legacies of these events, both locally and nationally.

These events have hitherto polarised opinions. Official, contemporary accounts characterise the rioters as thugs and agitators whose actions were fueled by excessive consumption of alcohol and by immorality. By contrast, local folklore and more recent historiographical works have portrayed the rioters as champions of the poor who had no other means of influence or protest. By considering the evidence from available primary sources in the context of the current historiographical debate, this study aims to provide

a more balanced analysis of the possible causes of the riots and the response of the authorities.

Historical Context

In order to consider the possible causes and motives behind the riots in Littleport and Ely and the subsequent reactions of the authorities, it is important to place them in the historical context of early nineteenth century England. The end of the Napoleonic wars led not to peace and prosperity, but harsh economic conditions and no political gains for most of the population. Popular discontent and protest were common-place and Clive Emsley describes a country preoccupied with fear of insurrection. He suggests that criminal activity had become inextricably linked to a fear of potential revolution from the latter years of the eighteenth century. This anxiety had been heightened by the French revolution, involving mass public violence against respectable, establishment figures and was further aggravated by accounts of economic unrest including machine breaking by Luddite textile workers between 1811 and 1816.¹ Emsley argues that popular journalism played upon this climate of fear for reasons of profit, which may offer some possible explanation for a high level of newspaper interest in the events of 1816. Peacock asserts that poorer members of early nineteenth century English society were regarded as ‘a potential revolutionary mass liable to emulate the continentals and take up arms against the established order’.² He also argues that such revolutionary

¹ Clive Emsley, *Crime, Police and Penal Policy: European Experiences 1750– 1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 145.

² A. J. Peacock, *Bread or Blood: A Study of the Agrarian Riots in East Anglia in 1816* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1965), p. 15.

threats were perceived to come primarily from the growing population of industrial workers in towns. He maintains that the rural population had been regarded as indolent, apathetic and, whilst prone to small scale riot, unlikely to ever take part in a mass protest that might cause a real threat to society.³ Given this perception, reports of a violent mob of at least 250 people rampaging around a small town were very likely to cause considerable alarm.⁴

As Archer comments, food riots were the most common forms of popular protest during the eighteenth century.⁵ However in 1816, the potential for food riots was exacerbated by a combination of circumstances. Veale and Endfield identify a year of worsening economic conditions, post-war adjustment, agricultural depression and the effects of inclement weather on yield, which together caused significant suffering.⁶ In its agricultural report in February 1816, for example, *The Observer* reported that both industrial and agricultural labourers were ‘in a state of extreme distress’.⁷ The Board of Agriculture’s report on conditions in 1816 presented a picture of a dire situation in East Anglia. Tenants were forced to abandon their holdings because of high rents, mortgages and loans which could not be met as grain prices dropped. Correspondents from Cambridgeshire, for example, reported large areas of agricultural land lying empty and

³ Peacock, p. 11.

⁴ Warren, Philip, ed, *Report of the Trials for Rioting at Ely and Littleport 1816* (Cambridge: Fieldfare Publications, 1997) (Originally published London: Hatfield and Twigg, 1816), p. 45.

⁵ John E. Archer, *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England 1780– 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 28.

⁶ Lucy Veale and Georgina H. Endfield, ‘Situating 1816, the ‘year without summer’, in the UK’, *The Geographical Journal*, 182, 4 (2016), 318-330, p. 319.

⁷ *The Observer*, 4 February 1816, p. 4.

falling rental returns for larger landowners desperate to find tenants, whilst obliged to support rising numbers of unemployed labourers needing parish assistance.⁸ A volcanic eruption in Indonesia in 1815 also added to the worsening economic situation as the ejected ash cooled the atmosphere.⁹ By early May 1816 *The Observer* reported that agricultural conditions had not improved because ‘sun and warm weather are the great wants’.¹⁰ Food prices rose as a result of increased demand, speculation and poor harvests throughout Europe.

It was against this historical background that the riots in Littleport and Ely took place and in the context of which these events and the way they unfolded need to be considered.

Popular Unrest.

There has been much debate about the extent to which popular disturbances in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were localized and particular in nature and cause or followed similar patterns of behavior and formed parts of wider movements with common causes. Others have attempted to characterize the nature of riots and identify those taking part and the people targeted. There has been substantial study of the

⁸ Board of Agriculture (Great Britain), *Agricultural state of the Kingdom, in February, March, and April 1816 : being the substance of the replies to a circular letter sent by the Board of Agriculture, to every part of the Kingdom*, (London: B. McMillan, 1816), pp. 33-43.

⁹ Linthicum, Kent, “‘Bread or Blood’: Climate Insecurity in East Anglia in 1816’, in *HistoricalClimatology.com/blog* (2017) available at < <http://www.historicalclimatology.com/blog/bread-or-blood-climate-insecurity-in-east-anglia-in-1816>> [accessed 5 May 2019]

¹⁰ *The Observer*, 5 May 1816, p. 4.

diverse range of possible causes, suggesting that riots were complex, heterogeneous events.

E. P. Thompson's 'moral economy' argues that there was tacit acceptance of food riots as part of negotiations between labourers, landowners and magistrates maintaining 'fair' wages and prices for food.¹¹ Thompson writes of the moral economy of the poor, based on goodness, fairness, and justice, as opposed to one where the market is assumed to be independent of such concerns, specifically in the context of widespread food riots in the English countryside in the late eighteenth century. He argues that such riots were generally peaceable acts that demonstrated a common political culture rooted in feudal rights to "set the price" of essential goods in the market. Above all, Thompson maintains, the protagonists acted in the belief that their behavior was 'legitimate', that they were defending traditional rights or customs and that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community.¹² The 'legitimacy' of this form of popular protest as part of a negotiation was further reinforced by the prompt concessions so often granted by the local authorities anxious to cut short any disturbance but disinclined to use military force.¹³

¹¹ E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), 76-136.

¹² Thompson, (1971), p. 78.

¹³ Thompson, (1971), p. 122.

As Archer observes, Thompson's thesis of a Moral Economy has been highly influential and has been widely supported by subsequent writers in the field.¹⁴ In his study of Tolpuddle, Carl J. Griffin, for example, suggests that the protagonists 'acted in ways consistent with shared understandings and experiences of collective action', which is reminiscent of the beliefs described by Thompson.¹⁵ Seal has attempted to explore the ways in which established 'folkloric' elements might have influenced the development and determined the forms of notable incidents of popular protest during the early decades of the nineteenth century. He argues that the nature of these incidents and the folkloric elements within them reflect a 'folk culture' possessing a concept of moral order quite distinct from that which, from the mid-eighteenth century, informed the attitudes of government and the administration of public order. Seal maintains that this traditional social order involved not only the rural poor, but also the farmers, gentry, clergy and magistracy in a reciprocal relationship based on custom and convention.¹⁶ Thus, for example, when food prices rose sharply, the local magistrates were expected to step in and enforce a 'fair' market price within the reach of the poor.

Whilst accepting as read some of the basic tenets of Thompson's argument, other writers have sought to question certain elements. Bohstedt criticizes Thompson for exaggerating the traditionalism of English crowds and Rule challenges the general application of moral economy ideas to eighteenth-century industrial relations.¹⁷

¹⁴ Archer, p. 37.

¹⁵ Carl J. Griffin, 'The Culture of Combination Solidarities and Collective Action Before Tolpuddle', *The Historical Journal*, 58, 2 (2015), 443-480 (p. 443).

¹⁶ Graham Seal, 'Tradition and Agrarian Protest in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales', *Folklore*, 99, 2 (1988), 146-169

¹⁷ Charles Tilly, 'Review: Moral Economy and Popular Protest: Crowds, Conflict and Authority by Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 31, 2 (2000), 259-260, (p. 260).

Nevertheless, Thompson's conception of popular disturbances as the actions of those excluded from any other form of political influence intent on restoring a moral economy by the only means available to them has proved highly influential.

However, others have pointed to evidence of somewhat different motives demonstrated by food rioters. Archer refers to cases where crowds scattered flour or grain rather than distributing it at a 'fair price' and suggests that this was done by way of punishment directed at specific individuals.¹⁸ Such popular disturbances, whilst primarily focused on affordable food prices and fair rates of pay, may also have provided opportunities to settle personal vendettas. Peter Jones, for example, notes that, although most crowd activity in his case study related to wages and threats to agricultural labour (threshing machines), they also appear to have targeted quite specifically a local iron foundry despite assurances that no threshing machines were made there.¹⁹ Similarly, William Beik, writing in the context of violent protests in early modern France, refers to a 'culture of retribution'. He argues that an element of vengeance in crowd behavior distinguishes this from Thompson's 'moral economy of the crowd' in that it highlights the desire to punish the audacity or negligence of people who should have known better, whereas the moral economy emphasizes the crowd's re-imposition of traditional norms and procedures. Beik suggests that, although like the 'moral economy', this popular impulse to punish was an expression of moral outrage, what was distinctive was the vindictive aspect. In these French instances, 'the riot was not just an attempt to oppose a

¹⁸ Archer, p. 36.

¹⁹ Peter Jones, 'Finding Captain Swing: Protest, Parish Relations, and the State of the Public Mind in 1830', *International Review of Social History*, 54, 3 (2009), 429-458, (p. 448).

novelty or correct an abuse [but] a focused and dynamic move to humiliate or harm the responsible parties'.²⁰

It might be argued that there has been a tendency amongst historians to treat the various forms and incidents of popular protest during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a broadly similar phenomenon. Peter Jones certainly maintains that the explanatory model of popular protest espoused by Thompson and his followers largely ignores the particular local conditions that gave rise to them.²¹ For Thompson, local conditions may have given a protest its particular piquancy, but it was the knowledge of and desire to reinforce statutory marketplace protections that gave it its motive force.²² Jones undertakes a detailed investigation of several disturbances in Berkshire to break away from previous 'history from below' ideology and a tendency to view popular disturbances as broadly similar in cause and form to seek 'a more nuanced understanding of particular moments of protest in the locality', placing more emphasis on local social and parochial relations.²³ Whilst he acknowledges that such incidents did share many common features and often took place during moments of widespread unrest, Jones argues that historians generally agree that most individual acts of protest were confined to the locality where they took place and that this was 'both a symptom and a reflection of the local conditions which gave rise to a particular protest event'.²⁴

²⁰ William Beik, 'The Violence of the French Crowd from Charivari to Revolution', *Past and Present*, 197, 1 (2007), 75-110 (pp. 76-77).

²¹ Jones, p. 431.

²² Jones, p. 432.

²³ Jones, p. 429.

²⁴ Jones, p. 431.

As Archer comments, the efforts of historians to identify the nature of the protagonists in food riots are fraught with difficulty given the paucity of evidence and the general brevity of accounts, which often refer only in vague terms to ‘the poor’. He cautions against the temptation to assume that it was the very poor on the margins of society who played a prominent role in such unrest. Archer points out that protesters were typically very much part of their community and often a very respectable part.²⁵ Somewhat easier to identify are the targets of rioting crowds as much more written evidence survives. Jones, for example, is able to provide a detailed analysis of the individuals targeted by rioters in Kintbury and shows that of fourteen named targets, twelve were vestrymen and at least two held specific parish offices.²⁶ He argues that this suggests they were targeted because they were responsible for forming and administering parish policy regarding the poor. Clues may therefore be drawn as to the motives of rioters by considering the identities and status of people and places that they targeted.

A further area of interest is the historiography regarding the nature of popular disturbances and the extent to which they borrowed from long established custom and popular culture. As referred to above, many have argued that rioters were following an established and tacitly accepted tradition of bargaining with local gentry and magistracy. Seal explores this further, describing as a manifestation of these established customs and relationships the role of traditional festive folkloric elements such as disguise, levying or

²⁵ Archer, pp. 33-34.

²⁶ Jones, p. 449.

'luck-visiting', perambulating, adornment, effigies, music and mock violence including verbal threats in social protests. He also argues that many of these ritual elements encouraged the participation of those not directly involved in the performance, ritual or custom and therefore implied communal sanction for such activities.²⁷

The Littleport and Ely riots therefore need to be considered in the context of considerable historiography about the nature and motives of popular disturbances in the early part of the nineteenth century.

Historiography of Littleport & Ely

Contemporary accounts state that, on 22nd May 1816, a group of agricultural labourers who had been drinking heavily at a Benefit Club meeting in a public house in Littleport armed themselves and went on the rampage, breaking into shops and homes, stealing or destroying possessions and demanding money with menaces. The next day, the crowd marched to Ely, demanding a reduction in the price of flour and a minimum wage of 2s6d. They were initially met with concessions from local magistrates, but when the disturbances continued into Friday 24th May, the magistrates backed by the Home Secretary sent in troops resulting in shooting and multiple arrests. A high-profile trial followed at a specially convened assizes, at which much was made of the relatively comfortable circumstances of the ringleaders and the immoral character of others. Five

²⁷ Seal, p. 150.

men were convicted and hanged and more sentenced to transportation.²⁸ Subsequently a few brief accounts were published, which focused primarily on the official Government account of the events by concentrating on detailed reports of the proceedings at the Special Assizes held between 17th and 22nd June. These portrayed the rioters as well-paid, ‘pot-valiant’ fenmen or individuals of unspeakably evil moral character, ‘baleful advisers’ encouraging rioting for the sake of it.²⁹ Such accounts were evidently written as warnings to other would-be rioters and whilst they acknowledged the hardships caused by agricultural depression leading to lack of employment, they also stressed the ‘necessity of meeting [the present distresses of the country] only with those means which the Constitution will warrant, instead of pursuing the maniac course of riot, robbery and murder’.³⁰ Later versions, including Johnson’s 1893 account and that in *The Victoria County History of Cambridgeshire*, follow those of contemporary writers, portraying the rioters as well-paid, drunken thugs on a mindless rampage.³¹

E. P. Thompson, in his Foreword to Peacock’s book, describes this incident as an important episode not only in East Anglian history, but in English history more

²⁸ Warren, p. 2.

Peacock, pp. 95-112.

²⁹ J. Easey, & Member of the Inner Temple, *A Full and correct report of the trials for rioting, at Ely and Littleport, in May 1816, before judges Abbott, Burrough, and Christian, at a special assize held at Ely, on Monday, the 17th day of June, and following days, with the opening charge of Mr. Justice Abbott, and the pleadings of counsel at full length, and a prefatory chapter on the state of the country, and the alarming effects of insubordination to the laws.* (London: Hatfield and Twigg, 1816) Cam.d.816.2, p. xxiv.

³⁰ Warren, p. xiv.

³¹ Johnson, C., *The Ely and Littleport riots: With an account of the trials and executions in 1816.*

(Littleport: George T. Watson, 1948) Originally published Ely: C. Johnson, 1893.

Atkinson, T.D. et al, ‘City of Ely: Seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’, in *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely: Volume 4, City of Ely; Ely N. and S. Witchford and Wisbech Hundreds*, ed. by R.B. Pugh (London: Victoria County History, 2002) pp. 42-45 available at <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol4/pp45-47>> [accessed 29 December 2018] p. 45.

generally.³² Yet events in Littleport and Ely appear to have been largely ignored by historians until the 1950s and 1960s when growing interest in social history ‘from below’ and the lives of ordinary people lent fresh perspective, for example, to the works of Wentworth-Day in his *A History of the Fens* and of Enid Porter, collector of Cambridgeshire folklore and curator of the County Folk Museum.³³ Porter edited Barrett’s *Tales from the Fens* heard as a child in the 1890s and these provide an account in the context of the lives of ordinary Fenmen.³⁴ Barrett describes an environment in which low wages and high prices meant that labourers, desperate to provide for their starving families, were driven to lawless behavior such as stealing sheep at night and local farmers were powerless to prevent them for fear for their own safety.³⁵ His perspective perhaps reflects the oral history source of his information, for example expressing the belief that the clergy were complicit in the efforts of the gentry to resist calls for better wages and fair food prices.³⁶ Wentworth-Day relies heavily on Johnson’s account and reproduces much of it, but he nevertheless does attempt to provide a more balanced perspective. He describes the initial target of the rioters’ aggression, Henry Martin, as a petty and mean local politician, ‘a bully on the Parish Council’, too apt to say that the miserable allowances given by Parish Officers were sufficient.³⁷ He also displays sympathy for the rioters, describing their Trial as

³² Peacock, p. 10.

³³ J. Wentworth-Day, *A History of the Fens* (London: George Harrap, 1954).

Enid Porter, ‘Notebooks’, in *Enid Porter Project* (2014) available at < <http://www.enidporterproject.org.uk/content/category/enid-porter/enid-porters-notebooks> > [accessed 19 May 2019].

³⁴ Barrett, W. H., *Tales from the Fens*, ed. by Enid Porter (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

³⁵ Barrett, pp. 85-86.

³⁶ Barrett, p. 88.

³⁷ Wentworth-Day, p. 214.

‘ruthless’ and ‘one of the blots on English judicial history’.³⁸ On the other hand he stresses that local landowners did their utmost to alleviate distress, believing it to be ‘their duty’ to their poorer neighbours.³⁹

Peacock explores possible causes of the riots in the context of the wider social, economic and political landscape.⁴⁰ He explores various factors that may have led to the outbreak of disturbances across East Anglia culminating in those at Littleport and Ely and the swift reaction of the authorities. Peacock suggests that possible motivations for the unrest include a reaction to campaigns by landowners for the protectionist Corn Laws and the strengthening of laws which discriminated against an increasingly landless poor including an increase in the maximum penalty for poaching.⁴¹ He also highlights the Government’s distrust of Benefit Clubs such as that frequented by the Littleport rioters, which it suspected to be ‘centres of sedition at village level’.⁴² Peacock therefore argues that the protagonists were desperate, having no other means of protest against an increasingly uncharitable and hostile Establishment or of improving their circumstances.⁴³ He also concludes that the trial and sentences reflect the Government’s intention to make an example and discourage further disturbances locally and nationally.⁴⁴

³⁸ Wentworth-Day, p. 222.

³⁹ Wentworth-Day, p. 213.

⁴⁰ Peacock, 1965.

⁴¹ Peacock, p. 43.

⁴² Peacock, p. 54.

⁴³ Peacock, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Peacock, p. 132.

The bicentenary of the riots in 2016 produced increased interest and several local history studies, which characterize the incident as the actions of poor, starving agricultural labourers and the subsequent brutal repression of protest by a Government determined to re-establish order at any cost. Local criminologist Rod Read, for example, is forthright in his analysis of the riots and the trial in his book, *Rebels with a cause*.⁴⁵ He argues that the rioters pursued a legitimate form of political protest and that the subsequent ‘Show Trial’ imposed unnecessarily harsh sentences which, he suggests, could be described as ‘Judicial Murder’.⁴⁶ Read’s book is a vivid illustration of the polarized viewpoints concerning the riots and the need for a more balanced analytical approach.

The surviving trial papers including witness and victim statements, together with Treasury Solicitor’s Office correspondence, provide a detailed account of the events as well as some indication of the concerns and motives behind the actions of the authorities. It must be acknowledged that using official documents does risk producing an overwhelmingly Establishment perspective on events. However, the personal correspondence of the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, and of Revd. Henry Law, Magistrate and Deacon of Ely Cathedral, also provide further insight into the views of other correspondents and the Parish Vestry records from Littleport give a local perspective. Newspaper articles and correspondence, both locally and nationally, also

⁴⁵ Rod Read, *Rebels with a cause: 1816 Rioting in the fens of Littleport and Ely examined by a local criminologist in 2016* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

⁴⁶ Read, p. 74.

provide evidence of various views expressed in contemporary debates surrounding the events. This study therefore attempts to provide a measured review of all available evidence and to consider to what extent the events of May and June 1816 in Littleport and Ely reflect the various theories of popular protest that have been espoused by previous scholars.

Chapter 2: The Riots and Their Suppression.

This chapter will examine contemporary narratives and surviving primary sources to provide an account of the disturbances and their suppression in May 1816. It will consider the evidence provided for the possible motivations behind the riots, the initial conciliatory reaction of local authorities and the subsequent rapid and forceful actions taken by central government to end the disturbances.

The Riots

In an account of the Littleport and Ely riots written by a barrister and published shortly after the trials, the writer includes a preface in which he describes the ‘distressed state of the country’, with depressed markets and loss of income, which meant that tenant farmers were unable to pay their rents and land was left uncultivated, leading to high unemployment and labourers ‘left to steal, beg or starve’. Alert to the likelihood of violent unrest as a result, he explains, the government took the precaution of stationing military detachments around the country.¹ It was in this context that the events of May 1816 unfolded.

¹ Philip Warren, ed, *Report of the Trials for Rioting at Ely and Littleport 1816* (Cambridge: Fieldfare Publications, 1997) (Originally published London: Hatfield and Twigg, 1816), pp. ii-iii.

The riots in Littleport and Ely took place between 22nd and 24th May, but as Peacock notes there had already been other disturbances in East Anglia in April and earlier in May.² Amos identifies rioting in a number of East Anglian towns including Bury St. Edmunds, Brandon, Norwich and Downham Market.³ These earlier troubles had evidently generated concern and had been covered by national newspapers as, on 25th May, *The Times* reported rioting at Downham Market and expressed concern that disturbances in Norfolk and Suffolk were ‘by no means at an end’.⁴ The article also made passing reference to an alarming riot at Ely. On 26th May *The Observer* reported disturbances in Brandon and the ‘alarming state of the county’, writing that the High Sheriff of Suffolk had arrived in London requesting urgent assistance from the Home Secretary to ‘restore tranquility’.⁵ Peacock suggests that, although disturbances in the region had been initially of a secret, covert nature involving isolated attacks on property under cover of darkness, as news spread the incidence of rioting became more cohesive, more violent and better supported.⁶ In his account written in 1893, which he claimed was based on the testaments of eye witnesses, C. Johnson maintains that the disturbances which took place in Littleport and Ely had spread from the neighbouring villages of Southery and Downham Market where there had been serious incidents on 20th and 21st May and the rioters had succeeded in persuading magistrates to release their comrades and accede to their demands.⁷ According to a statement provided by Revd. John

² A.J. Peacock, *Bread or Blood: A Study of the Agrarian Riots in East Anglia in 1816* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1965), p. 71.

³ S. W. Amos, 'Social discontent and Agrarian disturbances in Essex, 1795-1850', (unpublished M.A. thesis, Durham University, 1971), pp. 18-19.

⁴ *The Times*, 25 May 1816, p. 3.

⁵ *The Observer*, 26 May 1816, p. 4.

⁶ Peacock, p. 71.

⁷ C. Johnson, *The Ely and Littleport riots: With an account of the trials and executions in 1816*. (Littleport: George T. Watson, 1948) Originally published Ely: C. Johnson, 1893, p.6.

Vachell, Vicar of Littleport and local magistrate, news of these disturbances had already reached Ely and there had been ‘some dissatisfaction and symptoms of disorder’. The local magistrates had been concerned that the trouble might spread and had therefore sworn in special constables and taken steps to ensure that all Ely and Littleport labourers were gainfully employed.⁸

According to Johnson, a group of 50 or 60 Littleport labourers met at the *Globe* public house for a Benefit Club meeting on the evening of Wednesday 22nd May, where the principal topic of conversation was the disturbances in the adjoining villages. The men were apparently expecting to be joined by some from Southery but, as the evening’s drinking wore on and the visitors did not arrive, the Littleport labourers decided to take matters into their own hands and ‘have a fray to ourselves’.⁹ It is interesting to note the apparent origins of the Littleport riot as Benefit Clubs were regarded with suspicion by the authorities, who viewed them as potential sources of unrest and sedition, particularly as they normally met in public houses and led to drunkenness. The Revd. Howlett of Dunmow in Essex, for example, claimed that benefit clubs were ‘highly pernicious...contributed to increase of idleness and intemperance...illegal combinations [and] seditious proceedings’.¹⁰ Certainly much was made at the subsequent trials of the

⁸ Devon Archives (hereafter DA), 152M/C/1816/OH/16, Unrest – East Anglia: ‘A plain statement of facts relevant to the late Riots which took place at Downham, Littleport and Ely’ – John Vachell, June 1816, p. 1.

⁹ Johnson, p. 8.

¹⁰ Cited in Amos, p. 67.

role that drunkenness played in the behaviour of the rioters in Littleport and Ely, with money obtained with menaces being spent not on food but on alcohol.¹¹

As Peacock observes, most of the narrative of the Littleport and Ely riots derives from the surviving Prosecution Briefs for the subsequent trials.¹² Certainly, as indicated previously, contemporary published accounts also draw heavily on these documents. According to the statement of events drawn up by the Treasury solicitors, the labourers left the *Globe* and went to the house of Revd. Vachell with their demands for ‘wages raised to two shillings per day and flour lowered to two shillings and sixpence per stone’.¹³ According to the solicitors’ narrative, Vachell was obliged to accompany the crowd to a parley in the churchyard with the principal farmers. However, in his own statement, Vachell claims that he had tried to gather the farmers earlier in the evening when warned of the possibility of unrest, but they had refused to leave their families. Faced with the mob on his own, therefore, he agreed to their demands and told them that every possible remedy would be applied to alleviate their distresses.¹⁴ Vachell then accompanied the mob in the vain hope of maintaining order now that he had acceded to their demands. However, the solicitors’ statement suggests that these demands were not the crowds’ real purpose as many of them had by now broken away and had begun

¹¹ Charles Abbott, Gurney, John, & Great Britain. Assizes, *The charge of the Hon. Mr. Justice Abbott, to the Grand Jury of the Isle of Ely : At the special Assizes, holden at Ely, on Monday the 17th of June, 1816, before the Hon. Mr. Justice Burrough, and Edward Christian, Esq. Chief Justice of Ely; together with the speeches of the counsel for the crown ... and the solemn address of Mr. Justice Abbott to the several convicts, on passing sentence of death upon them.* (Ely: J. Clements, 1816) Cam.b.816.4, p. 4.

¹² Peacock, p. 159.

¹³ National Archives (hereafter NA), TS 11/1027/4353, ‘A narrative of some of the riotous transactions...’ in Re: Ely riots: Rex v Henry BENSON for a misdemeanour: Isle of Ely special sessions, 17 June 1816, p. 2.

¹⁴ DA, 152M/C/1816/OH/16, p. 1.

rioting and robbing around the village. Peacock comments that the incidents in Littleport until about eleven o'clock appeared not to be directed by anyone of authority and suggests that they 'simply had revenge as their objective'.¹⁵ It is notable that both the official statement and that of Vachell refer to the mob as being led by a man blowing a horn and indeed Johnson gives a lengthy account of the efforts of the men to find a suitable horn, which necessitated visiting several establishments.¹⁶ This is reminiscent of the traditional carnival rituals that Seal maintains were present in communal action in support of customary expectations amongst the rural poor.¹⁷ Given the violence that followed, there appears to have been an element of opportunistic settling of old scores under the protection of this festive attitude, which Seal argues was typically emphasized by rioters' habit of bedecking themselves with scarves, handkerchiefs and ribbons. Peacock observes that some of the crowd wore handkerchiefs and scarves taken from Vachell and that John Dennis bought ribbons for the crowd to wear.¹⁸ These reports illustrate the 'carnavalesque' behaviour of the crowd, which Bakhtin maintains was experienced as a sense of the community's collective power to challenge the ruling classes:

The carnivalesque crowd in the marketplace or in the streets is not merely a crowd. It is the people as a whole, but organized in their own way, the way of the people. It is outside of and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organization, which is suspended for the time of the festivity.¹⁹

¹⁵ Peacock, p. 100.

¹⁶ Johnson, p. 8.

DA, 152M/C/1816/OH/16.

¹⁷ Graham Seal, 'Tradition and Agrarian Protest in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales', *Folklore*, 99, 2 (1988), 146-169, p. 157.

¹⁸ Peacock, pp. 101; 106.

¹⁹ M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by H. Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 255.

Read quotes one of the protesters as saying ‘let’s go to Ely for a randy’ (in the sense of a riotous social occasion rather than sexual) and Seal comments that it was probably not coincidence that one of the days of rioting was the day of the Ely fair.²⁰ Certainly there does appear to have been a pattern of disturbances taking place on market days and the market place is a venue central to Bakhtin’s theories. In Wisbech, for example, William Watson writes that riots were narrowly avoided as a result of the deployment of troops when ‘a considerable number of bad characters...strayed into the town on the market-day, mixing with the populace in the streets and market, with every intention of exciting them to riot’.²¹

Having broken away from negotiations with Vachell, the crowd began to attack almost all the farmers and shopkeepers in Littleport, visiting some of them several times, demanding money and destroying or stealing property. One of the first objects of attack was the house of John Mobbs, an elderly farmer, which they forcibly entered, knocking him down and ransacking his bureau from which they stole £3.²² From there the crowd went to the house of another elderly farmer named Josiah Dewey, who they robbed of 100 guineas, breaking his windows, destroying some of his furniture and beating him and his wife.²³ Thomas South, William Dann and Robert Crabbe then led an attack on

²⁰ Rod Read, *Rebels with a cause: 1816 Rioting in the fens of Littleport and Ely examined by a local criminologist in 2016* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), p. 68.

Seal, p. 157.

²¹ William Watson, *An Historical Account of the Ancient Town and Port of Wisbech* (Wisbech: H. and J. Leach, 1827), p. 399.

²² Cambridgeshire Archives (hereafter CA), 283/L/1/26, ‘Fair copy of draft statement of offences committed’ in Ely and Littleport rioters: prosecution papers, 1816, p. 1.

²³ NA, TS 11/1027/4353, ‘A narrative...’, p. 2.

CA, L283/L/1/26, p. 1.

the house of Robert Speechley, ‘a very infirm and aged man between 70 and 80 years of age’, ransacking every room, threatening the occupants with a cleaver and robbing them of money and other articles.²⁴ The rioters next directed their anger at local farmer Henry Martin, who lived with his grandmother, Mrs. Rebecca Waddelow, a shopkeeper. Martin had been overseer of the poor in 1814 and according to the subsequent trial transcripts, ‘had become obnoxious to the prisoners from his conduct in the affairs of the parish’.²⁵ Martin escaped as he heard the crowd approaching, but the rioters were determined to find him, breaking into and pillaging the shop, ransacking the house, destroying the furniture and threatening the occupants and servants with their weapons. At about eleven o’clock the crowd returned to Revd. Vachell’s house, demanding money and beer. The Vicar offered them £2, but this was refused, and they demanded £10 or they would enter his house. Vachell drew a pistol, but was pushed aside by the crowd, who rushed in ‘committing every kind of wanton excess, stealing almost everything that was portable and demolishing the greater part of the rest...leaving the house a complete wreck’.²⁶ Managing to escape from the house, Vachell and his wife and daughter, ‘an invalid who had been particularly ill on that day’, were forced to hide in the fields for several hours before making their way in the dark across the fens to Ely on foot.²⁷

²⁴ NA, TS 11/1027/4353, ‘A narrative...’, p. 3.
CA, L283/L/1/26, p. 2.

²⁵ Warren, p. 9.

²⁶ NA, TS 11/1027/4353, ‘A narrative...’, p. 3.
Warren, p. 26.

²⁷ DA, 152M/C/1816/OH/16, p. 3.

After wrecking Vachell's house, the Littleport labourers began to prepare for an armed march to Ely to force the magistrates into making concessions. Isaac Taylor was robbed of £1 by Richard Burrige and Richard Nicholas and told that 'the mob which were then collected together at Littleport were going to Ely to take the Town up to Government'.²⁸

Witness statements and other trial papers indicate that there followed a series of incidents during which residents were robbed of both money and weapons. Robert Salmon took a gun from Thomas Waddelow and another from William Cutlack.²⁹

Burrige demanded a gun from Elizabeth Stimpson, whilst William Murfitt and John Warner woke John Rust, a labourer who shot wildfowl, and took two guns from him.³⁰

Somewhat later William Gotobed held up Robert Whitworth, (or Witmore depending on which document is used), and robbed him of a gun and two pitchforks, saying that he was off to join the crowd.³¹ The labourers then looked for a means of transporting themselves and their weapons to Ely, breaking into the farmer Henry Tansley's stable and stealing a wagon and four horses.³²

²⁸ CA, 283/L4/15, 'Isaac Taylor of Littleport, farmer against Richard Burrige and Richard Nicholas for robbery' in Ely and Littleport rioters: prosecution papers, 1816.

²⁹ CA, 283/L24, 'Fair copies of draft list of prisoners committed for trial' in Ely and Littleport rioters: prosecution papers, 1816, p. 10.

³⁰ CA, 283/L4/18, 'Elizabeth, wife of James Stimpson of Littleport, gardener against the same for demanding a gun'.

CA, 283/L4/65, 'John Rust of Littleport, fowler against William Murfit and John Warner, labourers of Littleport'.

³¹ CA, 283/L4/48, 'Robert Witmore of Littleport, labourer against William Gotobed of Littleport, labourer'.

CA, 283/L24, p. 5.

³² CA, 283/L4/92, 'Henry Tansley, gent and James Luddington, farmer both of Littleport against William Sibley for riot and attempted burglary'.

The rioters left Littleport in procession in the early hours of Thursday morning 23rd May, led by the wagon full of large guns and ammunition, and arrived on the outskirts of Ely at around four o'clock where they were met by some of the principal inhabitants including one of the magistrates, Revd. William Metcalfe. He tried to persuade the crowd to disperse, but they marched on and gathered in the Market Place where they again demanded of the magistrates an increase in wages and a reduction in the price of flour.³³ The magistrates, all clergymen, invited a deputation into *The White Hart Inn* and after some discussion, in order to persuade them to disperse, agreed to their demands and handbills were printed to this effect.³⁴ This is a prime example of the moral economy at work and Thompson would argue that the magistrates were simply acting in the manner expected of them as part of an established tradition of negotiation for fair food prices and wages.³⁵ However, the addition by the deputation of a demand for 'forgiveness for what had passed' caused considerable disagreement among the magistrates. Revd. Henry Law, who had been hastily summoned by the other magistrates, subsequently wrote to the Home Secretary at great pains to state that he had strongly advised against agreement to such a demand because the magistrates had no power to promise pardon.³⁶ Nevertheless, the magistrates' handbill included a promise of no prosecutions if the men dispersed immediately.

³³ NA, TS 11/1027/4353, 'A narrative...', p. 5.

³⁴ NA, HO/42/150, 'Magistrates Handbill' Ely 23 May 1816, Home Office: Domestic Correspondence, George III.

³⁵ E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), 76-136, (p. 122).

³⁶ Cambridge University Library (hereafter CUL), Add. MS. 4492 C.U.L., Letters from Rev Henry Law, Deacon of Ely, vindication of his conduct in Ely and Littleport Riots, 1816, p. 1.

The concession did have a considerable effect and, as Vachell observed in a letter to Law on 2nd June, ‘it certainly had one effect in sending three fourths of the Littleport rioters home, had they all remained, the disturbances at Ely would have been ten times greater’.³⁷ However, according to Peacock, many of the men who returned to Littleport passed the rest of the day spending stolen money on food and drink in all the public houses.³⁸ Meanwhile others remained in Ely, demanding beer from the local publicans and were subsequently joined by local inhabitants and some of the labourers from Downham in further criminal activities. A group of rioters led by John Dennis attacked the house of Henry Rickwood, a miller against whom according to Johnson ‘they entertained a particular hostility on account of his trade’, breaking his windows and threatening to pull down his house and mill unless they got fifty pounds.³⁹ They marched Mrs. Rickwood towards her bank to draw a cheque for fifty pounds, meeting Robert Edwards the banker on the way. When Edwards initially resisted, he received a blow to his head and after being pursued to his house and threatened with further violence was compelled to pay out the money.⁴⁰ The men involved appear to have been convinced that they were justified in their actions as they had no hesitation in giving Edwards their names as he divided the money equally between the representatives of Littleport, Downham and Ely men, John Dennis, Flanders Hopkins and Stephen Sanderson, although Dennis did initially give a false name. This is a clear example of the sense of legitimacy that Thompson argues was lent to popular unrest by the tradition

³⁷ CUL, Add. MS. 4492 C.U.L., p. 5.

³⁸ Peacock, p. 104.

³⁹ Johnson, p. 31.

⁴⁰ NA, TS 11/1027/4353, ‘A narrative...’, p. 7.

of the moral economy.⁴¹ The men's next target was William Cooper, who kept a flour and grocery shop where a large crowd gathered threatening to pull the property down. Cooper was obliged to hand over ten pounds, divided equally between the Littleport and the Ely men, who then moved on to visit George Stevens, another miller, from whom they demanded fifty pounds before settling for ten.⁴² The rioters spent the rest of the day visiting other houses compelling the residents to buy beer for them and becoming increasingly 'inflamed with drink and uttering the most alarming threats against individuals by name' to the great alarm of the inhabitants of Ely.⁴³

As discussed above, the rioters gave as their prima facie motive the lack of wages and inflated price of flour. Yet the authorities maintained at the subsequent trials that many who took part were far from starving, being skilled men of relatively comfortable means.⁴⁴ The Treasury Solicitors in fact drew up a list of the prisoners showing their occupations, earnings, parish allowances and any property and the sizes of their families. Whilst the list contains several skilled tradesmen including William Beamiss (shoemaker), Aaron Layton (bricklayer), Daniel Wilson (blacksmith), Brassett Rayner (shopkeeper) and John Dennis (victualler), the majority are described as 'labourers' and several of them were evidently in receipt of Parish assistance. Most received weekly earnings of between six and fifteen shillings and many had large families to support.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Thompson, (1971), p. 78.

⁴² Peacock, p. 105.

⁴³ NA, TS 11/1027/4353, 'A narrative...', p. 8.

⁴⁴ Warren, p. 2.

⁴⁵ CA, 283/L28, 'Statement of the earnings of the Littleport prisoners' in Ely and Littleport rioters: prosecution papers, 1816.

This suggests that there was a genuine reason behind their demands for higher wages and lower prices and that this might be termed a ‘food riot’. Certainly, many of the victims targeted by the mob, most notably Henry Rickwood and William Cooper, appear to have been so because they were perceived to be culpable in the imposition of inadequate wages and inflated flour prices. Others such as Vachell and Henry Martin were perhaps targeted because of their responsibility for apportioning Parish assistance. These targets very much conform to what might be expected in a food riot.⁴⁶ However, the level of violence and theft which featured in these events, if Archer is correct in his assertions, was unusual in a food riot. This rare behavior tended to be a form of revenge or punishment and suggested that some disturbances evolved beyond simple protests about food prices.⁴⁷ As already referred to, there was some traditional ‘carnival’ behaviour in evidence in the crowd’s behavior and some of the attacks might be characterized as revenge attacks under cover of these festivities, reminiscent of the ‘culture of retribution’ described by Beik, who comments that in such circumstances ‘houses were torn apart’ by mobs.⁴⁸ Aaron Layton, for example, who was involved in the incident where the crowd threatened to pull William Cooper’s shop down, was a disgruntled tenant of Cooper’s.⁴⁹

The Restoration of Order

⁴⁶ Peter Jones, ‘Finding Captain Swing: Protest, Parish Relations, and the State of the Public Mind in 1830’, *International Review of Social History*, 54, 3 (2009), 429-458, pp. 448-449.

⁴⁷ John E. Archer, *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England 1780– 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 36.

⁴⁸ William Beik, ‘The Violence of the French Crowd from Charivari to Revolution’, *Past and Present*, 197, 1 (2007), 75-110, p. 106.

⁴⁹ Peacock, p. 105.

As discussed above, the disturbances were met initially by conciliation from the Ely magistrates. However, as Vachell comments in his letter to Law, they were compelled to accede to the demands in an attempt to avoid a major riot in Ely as they were ‘absolute prisoners in the room at the mercy of a most ferocious armed rabble without any means of defense.’⁵⁰ Although, on receiving Vachell’s report of events in Littleport, the magistrates had sworn in local tradesmen as Special Constables and had taken the precaution of dispatching a rider to Bury St Edmunds to ask for a detachment of troops, the town had no effective means of resisting a sizeable armed mob.⁵¹ Having compromised with the rioters, the magistrates therefore resolved to send Law to London to seek further assistance from the Home Secretary, Sidmouth, before returning with his fellow magistrate Sir Henry Bate Dudley. Law also called at Royston on his journey and ordered Captain Wortham’s troop of Yeomanry Cavalry to head for Ely immediately.⁵² Meanwhile a detachment of eighteen men from the First Regiment of the Royal Dragoons, commanded by Captain Methuen, arrived in Ely mid. afternoon on Thursday and the local inhabitants were encouraged to assist them in restoring order, with several of the rioters taken into custody. As Read comments, the lack of a local police force would have meant that the authorities had little alternative but to resort to the military for assistance when faced by a disorderly mob.⁵³ Ely was reported as ‘tolerably quiet’ that night, although there were further disturbances in Downham and Littleport.

⁵⁰ CUL, Add. MS. 4492 C.U.L., p. 5.

⁵¹ J. Wentworth-Day, *A History of the Fens* (London: George Harrap, 1954), p. 216.

⁵² DA, 152M/C/1816/OH/18, Unrest – East Anglia: Action taken by magistrates against disturbances with particular reference to the role of Mr Law – William Plumer to H.A., 2nd June 1816.

⁵³ Read, p. 70.

On Friday morning Law and Dudley arrived in Ely with forty-two cavalrymen from Royston and determined to march immediately to Littleport to subdue the rioters. Dudley rode at the head of the Dragoons and twenty cavalry and was accompanied by volunteers from the principal inhabitants of Ely.⁵⁴ According to Vachell, they were also joined by the staff of the Cambridge Militia under Lieutenant Woollard and the combined force took the Littleport men by surprise in *The George* public house.⁵⁵ There followed an armed confrontation, during which Dudley was hit over the head with an iron bar by James Cammell and shots were exchanged. Thomas South shot a Waterloo veteran named Wallance in the arm and several of the rioters were injured before most were detained.⁵⁶ Wallance eventually had his arm amputated and as recorded in the Vestry Minutes for 3rd December 1816 was granted a life pension of five pounds per annum out of the Littleport poor rates.⁵⁷ According to the Coroner's report, the only fatality, Thomas Sindall, attempted to take a gun from one of the troopers who was guarding him and when unsuccessful tried to escape, but was shot dead through the head.⁵⁸ The labourers scattered after the shooting, chased by the soldiers and according to Law in his letters to Sidmouth fifty-six were caught that evening and a further forty-two on the Saturday.⁵⁹ The authorities were tenacious in their pursuit of those who absconded, employing Bow Street officers to apprehend them. These included Aaron

⁵⁴ NA, TS 11/1027/4353, 'A narrative...', pp. 8-9.

⁵⁵ DA, 152M/C/1816/OH/16, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Peacock, p. 111.

Johnson, p. 15.

⁵⁷ CA, P109/8/1, Vestry Minute Book, Littleport Parish Church, 3 December 1816.

⁵⁸ *Morning Chronicle*, London, 3 May 1816.

⁵⁹ CUL, Add. MS. 4492 C.U.L., p. 15.

Layton, a bricklayer from Ely, who officers were instructed to arrest at his uncle's address in London.⁶⁰

The reasons for such a swift and brutal suppression of the disturbances by local magistrates with military assistance and support from central Government probably rested primarily on the need to set an example that would act as a major deterrent for any similar insurrection in the region and other areas of the country. The Ely magistrates were certainly under the impression that their efforts to apprehend and bring to justice the culprits were 'to be considered not merely with regard to local effect, they were to be a warning to the whole kingdom' and that because of the rigorous approach that the Government was pursuing they had considered it their duty to spare no expense. This led subsequently to a robust exchange with the Treasury Solicitors regarding the Government's disinclination to defray the costs.⁶¹ Nevertheless, as will be discussed in later chapters, the considerable coverage of events in the press provides an indication of the national importance of the authorities' rapid and robust response to the riots.

The punitive measures can also be seen to have been a clear refutation of previous conciliatory responses on the part not only of the Ely magistrates, but also those at Brandon and Downham Market, which were believed to have emboldened the Littleport and Ely labourers and encouraged the latest disturbances. The Ely magistrates received

⁶⁰ NA, HO/42/150, 'Letter from W. Hobhouse, Treasury Solicitor, to J. Beckett, at the Home Office, concerning arrangements for the apprehension of Aaron Layton' Ely 28 May 1816.

⁶¹ CA, 283/L49/38, 'H.C. Litchfield to Lord Sidmouth: Abstract of bills enclosed identifying 'usual', 'doubtful' and 'special' claims also answers to Mr. Litchfield's observations on the riot bills 20 October 1816' in Ely and Littleport rioters: prosecution papers, 1816

considerable criticism for their initial compromises and were characterized as a group of frail, elderly clergymen.⁶² The authorities in surrounding areas were quick to distance themselves from such conciliatory measures, for example, the Lord Lieutenant and magistrates of Suffolk resolved that ‘no concessions should be made, nor any agreement entered into with bodies of people assembled in a riotous or threatening manner’.⁶³ Law and Dudley were determined to adopt an uncompromising approach and Dudley in particular was to be widely praised for his decisive action in suppressing the rioters.⁶⁴ Eighty two prisoners were eventually arrested and committed for trial.⁶⁵

Summary

The primary sources and contemporary accounts considered in this chapter have suggested that the riots in Littleport and Ely, although essentially driven by genuine grievances regarding low wages and high food prices, were also used by some as an opportunity to settle old scores and punish unpopular local figures. The disturbances were met initially by the local magistrates with conciliation, perhaps because of a certain sympathy with the rioters’ complaints, but primarily because they had little choice being without any military support when faced by a sizeable armed mob. The suppression which followed from central authorities was swift and violent and designed both as a refutation of the initial conciliatory response and a significant deterrent to any further

⁶² DA, 152M/C/1816/OH/18.

⁶³ *The Times*, 30 May 1816, p. 3.

⁶⁴ *Bury and Norwich Post*, 3 July 1816.

⁶⁵ Warren, p. 5.

public unrest. This was to be followed by a Special Assizes in order to reinforce this message.

Chapter 3: The Trials.

This chapter will use surviving prosecution papers in the Cambridgeshire Archives, together with contemporary accounts, newspaper commentary on the legal proceedings and correspondence between central government and local protagonists to provide an account of the trials and subsequent punishments of the convicted. It will demonstrate that the decision of the authorities to hold a Special Assizes was motivated primarily by a desire to re-impose order with a high-profile demonstration of the power of Justice given the pervading atmosphere of fear of widespread insurrection. Trial papers prepared by the Treasury Solicitor will demonstrate that cases were carefully chosen to ensure that identified ‘ringleaders’ were convicted for the most serious offences which carried the maximum penalties. The public executions of the convicted and their confessions and expressions of regret were intended to serve as an example to others and prevent any further spread of the disturbances.

Preparations.

As referred to above, the authorities were quick to pursue and apprehend the labourers who had scattered following the intervention of the military. A royal proclamation was issued from Whitehall and displayed prominently in all areas where there had been any signs of unrest, making it clear that the Crown would spare no effort in punishing offenders, and offering a reward of one hundred pounds to anyone who apprehended any

perpetrator subsequently convicted of a felony.¹ Notably, once the trials were over and the threat of unrest had subsided, although seven individuals submitted claims for a reward having provided information to secure the capture of rioters, the Home Office rejected their claims on the grounds that none of the relevant offenders had subsequently been convicted of felonies.² Nevertheless the Government was clearly determined, in the immediate aftermath of the riots, to make an example of the perpetrators and provide a deterrent to any further unrest as there was still very real anxiety in the country that the disturbances would spread to form a widespread rebellion. An article in the *Liverpool Mercury* on 31st May, for example, provides an insight into the local panic which events in Littleport and Ely had caused. The article reported that great alarm had been caused in Cambridge by the appearance of ‘numerous knots of strange countrymen...with large sticks’ coming into the city. It was feared that Fen rioters were preparing to attack the city and the Mayor and Magistrates had sworn in three hundred principal inhabitants as special constables. Meanwhile, Heads of Houses of the colleges had also met and resolved to arm their students if necessary.³ This is a telling account of the impact of the riots, not only on the inhabitants of the surrounding area, but on a nationwide audience. The residents of Littleport were understandably nervous and at a Vestry Meeting on 14th June agreed arrangements for six watchmen to patrol every night from half an hour after sunset until one hour after daylight. Constables and special constables were also instructed to disperse any ‘parties standing idly in the streets’.⁴

¹ *Bury and Norwich Post* (hereafter *BNP*), 29 May 1816.

² A. J. Peacock, *Bread or Blood: A Study of the Agrarian Riots in East Anglia in 1816* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1965), p. 115.

³ *Liverpool Mercury* (hereafter *LM*), 31 May 1816.

⁴ Cambridgeshire Archives (hereafter CA), P109/8/1, 14 June 1816.

It was in the context of the threat of further violent uprisings and the need to re-establish order that the authorities therefore decided to hold a Special Assizes at Ely. Not only were the central authorities intent on providing a demonstration of swift justice that would deter others from further violence, but the local authorities were anxious to proceed as quickly as possible given that the small Gaol and Bridewell at Ely now contained so many prisoners, necessitating considerable expenditure on extra guards for the safety of the town. The magistrates also spent three hundred and forty-five pounds one shilling and eightpence on alterations to the Shire Hall which were deemed essential for the accommodation of trials presided over by three judges.⁵

The Trials.

Given the evident level of anxiety caused by the riots, it is perhaps understandable that press interest in the trial that followed was equally strong. On 8th June, an article in the *York Herald* announced that the Special Assizes were now fixed to commence on 17th June.⁶ The authorities were evidently determined to make the occasion as much of a spectacle and show of the power of both the secular and the Church establishment as possible. It is worth noting at this point that the Bishop of Ely held secular jurisdiction over the Isle of Ely until 1836 and that the trials were therefore conducted in his name.⁷

⁵ CA, 283/L49/38.

⁶ *York Herald*, 8 June 1816.

⁷ CA, T/E/AZ254, Act extinguishing the secular jurisdiction of the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of Ely in certain liberties in Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Cambridgeshire (6 and 7 William IV), 17 August 1836.

Johnson describes how the judges arrived in Ely and breakfasted with the Bishop at his Palace before proceeding in solemn procession, led by the Bishop and his sword of state, to a special service in the Cathedral. An anthem was composed specifically for the occasion by the cathedral organist and the sermon was preached by Bate Dudley from the text ‘The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient’. The service concluded with Handel’s *Hallelujah Chorus*.⁸ For the Special Commission, the Government had drafted in two High Court judges, James Burrough from the Court of Common Pleas and Charles Abbott from the King’s Bench, much to the irritation of the third member of the Bench, Edward Christian, Chief Justice of the Isle of Ely, whose legal authority had been superseded by this move.⁹ This is evidently a clear indication of the Home Office’s determination that the trial should proceed according to plan.

As might be expected, the *Bury and Norwich Post* covered the trial in full on 26th June.¹⁰ Every edition of *The Times* from 18th to 22nd June included a detailed, case by case account of the previous day’s proceedings at Ely enabling its national readership to witness the trials as they unfolded.¹¹ The reports included the transcript of Mr Justice Abbott’s opening address to the Grand Jury. Notably Abbott observed that the usual hardships ‘incident to a state of poverty’ had been ‘aggravated by the peculiarity of the

⁸ C. Johnson, *The Ely and Littleport riots: With an account of the trials and executions in 1816*. (Littleport: George T. Watson, 1948) Originally published Ely: C. Johnson, 1893. Johnson, p. 17.

⁹ *Manchester Mercury*, 11 June 1816, p. 3.

¹⁰ *BNP*, 26 June 1816.

¹¹ *The Times* (hereafter *TT*), 18-22 June 1816, p. 3.

seasons', the factor highlighted by Veale and Endfield.¹² However, he made clear that the trial must be a warning to other would-be rioters, stating that

it is of the highest importance to the peace and safety, not only of this isle, but of the surrounding country, that...all who read the account of its proceedings...may be convinced by the awful lesson which may here be taught.¹³

He dismissed the claim that the riots were caused by need as the financial circumstances of the perpetrators did not fit with this picture. Certain individuals had taken advantage of poor, ignorant people and inflamed them into open hostility for their own ends. This speech set the tone for the trials and for subsequent accounts of them. Abbott's argument illustrates a prevailing attitude identified by Muskett, considering the reaction of the authorities to riots in 1816 and 1822. He argues that, although poverty was recognized as a major contributory factor towards unrest, it was considered as the inevitable result of economic forces and the failure of magistrates to regulate prices or lay down minimum wages was never considered. Any rioters who were not personally in desperate need must have acted not out of a sense of social justice, but with evil and malicious intent.¹⁴

The speed with which accounts of the trial began to reach the national press lead Peacock to question how a London newspaper managed to obtain the entire text of Abbott's speech in time to publish it on Tuesday morning and he suggests that the press

¹² Lucy Veale and Georgina H. Endfield, 'Situating 1816, the 'year without summer', in the UK', *The Geographical Journal*, 182, 4 (2016), 318-330, (p. 319).

¹³ *TT*, 18 June 1816, p. 3.

¹⁴ Paul Muskett, 'The East Anglian agrarian riots of 1822', *Agricultural History Review*, 32, 1 (1984) 1-13, p. 12.

had been given the transcript in advance so that it was widely circulated.¹⁵ There were indeed comments at the time and Cobbett hinted at this in his *Weekly Political Register*, noting that Ely was 67 miles from London and the speech was made at almost 7pm on Monday evening.¹⁶ Local newspapers around the country also published full accounts of the trials, reflecting the degree of national interest in the proceedings.

The trials continued over five days, during which time thirteen cases were heard.¹⁷ In the first, twelve individuals were charged with ‘burglariously entering the dwelling house of Rebecca Waddelow’ and stealing various items.¹⁸ Mr. Gurney, Counsel for the Crown, argued that any one of the more than one hundred rioters might justifiably have been charged with these offences, but that the Crown had selected ‘twelve persons who were more actively employed than the rest’.¹⁹ The Treasury Solicitor, Hobhouse, had already outlined to Sidmouth the course that the trial would take, assuring him that he would ‘endeavour to select the Cases where the greatest outrages were committed and the largest number of prisoners can be proved to have been engaged’ and that he could ‘see no reason to doubt that the offences will be fixed by satisfactory evidence on the ringleaders’.²⁰ The records of the trials confirm that the authorities chose to concentrate on the most serious felonies, which would attract the maximum sentences. The majority

¹⁵ Peacock, p. 125.

¹⁶ *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 22 June 1816.

¹⁷ CA, E/QS03, Isle of Ely Quarter Sessions – Minute Book, 18 October 1815 – 4 December 1819, pp. 97-101.

¹⁸ Johnson, p. 20.

¹⁹ Johnson, p. 22.

²⁰ National Archive (hereafter NA), HO/42/150, ‘Letter from W. Hobhouse, Treasury Solicitor, to Lord Sidmouth’ 29 May 1816.

of the thirteen cases related either to burglaries and thefts with menaces at the properties of Rebecca Waddelow, Josiah Dewey, Robert Speechly, Robert Edwards and Revd. Vachell or to thefts with menaces from William Cooper, George Stevens and Henry Tansley. Additionally, William Beamiss the younger was tried for the highway robbery of Henry Evans and he and his father were tried for the assault and robbery of Robert Cheeseright.²¹ Finally, on Friday 21st June, Mr. Gurney addressed the court, arguing that the government believed enough cases had now been heard and offenders convicted ‘to teach the inhabitants of this isle the necessity of obedience to the laws, and of respect for the peace and property of their neighbours’.²² A further thirty labourers were therefore put to the bar, cautioned on the evils of drink and allowed to go free on condition that each gave a recognizance of fifty pounds and two sureties of ten pounds.²³

There was further local and national newspaper coverage of the sentencing on Saturday 22nd June. *The Times* published a short summary, noting that 24 men had been sentenced to death, but that 19 of them had their sentences commuted.²⁴ Of those reprieved, one was to be transported for life, five were sentenced to fourteen years’ transportation, three were to be transported for seven years and a further ten were to serve twelve months in Ely goal.²⁵ *The Examiner* reported the crime and sentence of each rioter and carried an account of Abbott’s address to the prisoners. He repeated his

²¹ Johnson, pp.20-43.

²² Warren, p. 60.

²³ CA, E/QS03, p. 102.

Philip Warren, ed, *Report of the Trials for Rioting at Ely and Littleport 1816* (Cambridge: Fieldfare Publications, 1997) (Originally published London: Hatfield and Twigg, 1816), pp. 61-62.

²⁴ *TT*, 30 June 1816, p. 4.

²⁵ Peacock, p. 127.

assertion that the rioters were not motivated by hunger, arguing that ‘there has not appeared in the condition, circumstances, or behavior of any one of you, any reason to suppose that you were instigated by distress’.²⁶ The *Royal Cornwall Gazette* also reproduced Abbott’s speech and commended it to its readers in the hope that it would provide ‘extensive benefit’ as a lesson in the ‘effects of a riotous and unruly disposition’.²⁷ Abbott’s address to the five remaining prisoners made clear the Judges’ reasons for marking them out for execution. William Beamiss the elder, a shoemaker, was singled out as someone whose condition in life should have caused him to restrain others from violence rather than becoming one of the most active in that violence and was also condemned for the ‘influence of [his] evil example’ on his young, impressionable son. Similarly, John Dennis’s status as a victualler singled him out for the severest punishment as did evidence that he had armed himself with a gun and made himself ‘leader of that lawless band’. George Crow was condemned as a result not only of his actual violence towards Rebecca Waddelow, but because of the evidence given of his stated intent to murder Henry Martin if he had found him. Isaac Harley was identified as the instigator of the violent attack on Revd. Vachell and his home and family. Finally, Thomas South the younger was singled out as having been one of the most active and particularly condemned for threatening the elderly Mrs. Waddelow by waving a cleaver over her head.²⁸ It is evident that, in passing these sentences, the trial

²⁶ *The Examiner*, London, 30 June 1816.

²⁷ *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 6 July 1816.

²⁸ Cambridge University Library (hereafter CUL), Cam.b.816.4, Charles Abbott, Gurney, John, & Great Britain. Assizes, *The charge of the Hon. Mr. Justice Abbott, to the Grand Jury of the Isle of Ely : At the special Assizes, holden at Ely, on Monday the 17th of June, 1816, before the Hon. Mr. Justice Burrough, and Edward Christian, Esq. Chief Justice of Ely; together with the speeches of the counsel for the crown ... and the solemn address of Mr. Justice Abbott to the several convicts, on passing sentence of death upon them.* (Ely: J. Clements, 1816), pp. 16-18.

judges had achieved the goal of singling out and convicting the ringleaders to make an example of them and to discourage any further unrest.

The Executions.

The executions of the five men, which followed on 28th June, evidently gave the authorities another opportunity to demonstrate the power of the justice system and provide a salutary lesson to any malcontents considering similar protests. Accounts of the proceedings were once again widely published in the press. The *Lancaster Gazette* described in detail the solemn procession of three hundred court officers and respectable inhabitants on horseback that accompanied the condemned men and included a copy of the men's 'voluntary confession'.²⁹ The local magistrates had gone to considerable expense and effort to stage an impressive public spectacle. All the special constables and peace officers were in attendance, together with three Chief Constables with 'their staffs of office covered in black crepe'. The prisoners, with white caps tied with black ribbons on their heads, were conveyed in a cart with elevated seats covered in black cloth.³⁰ Godfrey and Lawrence observe of such public executions that they were perceived to 'set an example' and that for the condemned to ask for mercy and repent was seen as highly effective and desirable.³¹ The details of the executions and the confessions of the prisoners, including their acknowledgement of the justice of their sentences, were widely publicized. Not only did reports appear in newspapers around

²⁹ *Lancaster Gazette*, 13 July 1816.

³⁰ *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, 5 July 1816, p. 3.

³¹ Barry Godfrey and Paul Lawrence, *Crime and Justice 1750–1950* (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2005), p. 74.

the country but, as was often the case for public executions at the time, these accounts were reproduced in printed broadsheets and sold to the masses as far away, for example, as North Shields.³² The *Liverpool Mercury* also reported that ‘this awful business is over!’, highlighting the great penitence of the men who had acknowledged the justice of their sentence and cautioned their neighbours ‘against the sad effects of riot and misrule’.³³

The Treasury Solicitor, in his pre-trial narrative of events, had specifically argued that the crimes committed in Littleport and Ely were not born out of the desperation of hungry labourers but ‘a diabolical scheme to create confusion and to afford a pretext for plunder’ hatched by certain individuals.³⁴ The authorities were convinced that

an intimate connection and secret communication existed between the two parishes [Littleport and Southery], and that an organized system of riot and plunder which was to have been carried into every parish in that quarter had existed for some days previously.³⁵

This of course reflects the prevalent fear of insurrection in the country following the French revolution and the Napoleonic wars and the rise of Luddism, which Emsley describes as a pervasive ‘fear of sinister individuals...waiting for opportunities that riot and revolution would bring for looting and mayhem’.³⁶ In this climate, the trials and executions of so called ‘ringleaders’ at Ely were evidently intended to root out any

³² CUL, Broadside B.81.6, *Particulars of the Execution and Confession of the five unfortunate Men*. (North Shields: W. Orange Printer, 1816).

³³ *Liverpool Mercury*, 5 July 1816.

³⁴ NA, TS 11/1027/4353, ‘A narrative...’, p. 11.

³⁵ NA, TS 11/1027/4353, ‘A narrative...’, p. 1.

³⁶ Clive Emsley, Clive, *Crime, Police and Penal Policy: European Experiences 1750– 1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 145.

remaining seeds of popular unrest, not only locally but also in the wider context.

Peacock argues that the measures taken by the authorities were only partially successful.

Within a few years riots of a similar kind were common in East Anglia, particularly in Norfolk, although it was noticeable that Littleport, Ely and Downham Market remained quiet, suggesting this may have been effective in subduing the temptation for any unrest in the immediate area if not more generally.³⁷

SUMMARY

The evidence considered in this chapter suggests that the decision of the authorities to hold a Special Assizes was motivated in part by practical concerns for the continuing cost of maintaining security in the area whilst large numbers of prisoners were awaiting trial. However, the Crown's chief motivation appeared to be a desire to re-impose order with a high-profile demonstration of the power of Justice given the pervading atmosphere of fear of widespread insurrection. The trials and subsequent executions were certainly well publicised and received widespread, detailed newspaper coverage around the country. The proceedings managed by the authorities provide a powerful illustration of what Foucault argues were public rituals designed to re-establish order and re-assert the power of the Crown.³⁸ Accounts of the proceedings and the trial papers prepared by the Treasury Solicitor demonstrate that cases were carefully chosen to ensure that identified 'ringleaders' were convicted for the most serious offences

³⁷ Peacock, p. 133.

³⁸ Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1991), p. 3.

which carried the maximum penalties. The commonly held belief, that anyone not in desperate need themselves who engaged in popular protest did not do so for any altruistic reasons but with sinister motives, singled out these 'ringleaders'. Their public confessions and expressions of regret at their executions were thus meant to serve as an example to others and prevent any further spread of the disturbances.

Chapter 4: Aftermath and Legacies.

As discussed above, local and national opinion appears to have been initially largely supportive of the authorities' response to the riots. However, as the immediate fears surrounding the events began to subside and the impact on individuals became more apparent, evidence suggests that some people began to question and to criticise. This chapter will examine the evidence provided by newspaper articles and correspondence in the weeks following the trials, together with private correspondence between some of the individuals involved, to assess local and national reaction to the riots, trials and punishments. It will consider the extent to which the residents of Ely and Littleport supported the actions of the authorities and reveal some of the local issues and disagreements which followed as well as the personal impact on some of the main protagonists.

In the immediate aftermath of the events in May and June 1816, reaction in the local and national press was almost overwhelmingly supportive of the actions of the authorities. In its account of the executions, for example, *The Liverpool Mercury* noted that, despite the large crowd in attendance and 'heart-rending cries and prayers for mercy', 'not a murmur was heard against the justice of the sentence'.¹ The *Bury and Norwich Post* reported that the men's bodies had been respectfully laid out overnight in a house

¹ *Liverpool Mercury* (hereafter *LM*), 5 July 1816.

provided by the Chief Constable and described the next day's funeral, with a procession to St. Mary's Church led by a choir singing a psalm and watched by a 'great concourse of spectators'. The article emphasized the 'decent and respectful manner' in which they had been laid to rest and maintained that any reports of a disturbance on this occasion were unfounded.² The evidence of these accounts suggests that events had clearly had a profound effect on local inhabitants, but provide no indication of any local disapproval of the outcome. Later newspaper coverage, however, provides insight into some local issues and disagreements surrounding the events and evidence that they continued to be a matter of some considerable concern and debate in wider circles.

Local Impact.

The report above in the *Bury and Norwich Post* portrayed the laying out of the executed men's bodies in a house overnight as a positive step with many hundreds of people therefore able to pay their respects 'at the expressed wish of their relations'.³ However, by 3rd August a correspondent to the *Cambridge Gazette* took a very different view of events, complaining that the authorities had refused to release them to their families and had instead made a public spectacle of them to anyone who wanted to look at them.⁴

² *Bury and Norwich Post* (hereafter *BNP*), 10 July 1816.

³ *BNP*, 10 July 1816.

⁴ *Cambridge Gazette*, 3 August 1816.

On 3rd July, the *Bury and Norwich Post* had published a vote of thanks from the Grand Jury to Bate Dudley for quelling the riots and restoring peace.⁵ A public subscription to Bate Dudley was opened, which had reached the respectable figure of one hundred and seventy nine pounds and thirteen shillings by the middle of June.⁶ Subsequent evidence, however, suggests that Bate Dudley was not universally admired as correspondence followed complaining that he was unfairly credited with single-handedly bringing the situation under control. One correspondent accused the Baronet of ‘selfishly allowing the whole praise to be bestowed upon his exertions’ and argued that credit should be shared with the other local magistrates and inhabitants who had already done much to disperse the rioters long before he even arrived in Ely. The writer went so far as to suggest that he deliberately delayed his arrival until the mob was too drunk to resist and there was a large military force in place.⁷ Revd. Henry Law was also evidently subject to considerable criticism for his apparent acquiescence in the other local magistrates’ acceptance of the rioters’ demands at Ely and went to great lengths to restore his own reputation. Not only, as referred to previously, did he himself write to the Home Secretary, but he also enlisted the support of other influential people to intervene in his defence. William Plumer, for example, wrote to Sidmouth to stress the courage and self-sacrifice that Law had demonstrated, accompanying Bate Dudley in military action against the mob, riding on horseback contrary to his doctor’s advice and being ‘much in the midst of the battle’.⁸

⁵ *BNP*, 3 July 1816.

⁶ *BNP*, 17 July 1816.

⁷ *BNP*, 7 August 1816.

⁸ Devon Archives (hereafter DA), 152M/C/1816/OH/18, pp. 2-3.

Apart from some feelings of injustice amongst the local magistrates, there had also, as referred to previously, been some degree of resentment on the part of the local Chief Justice, Edward Christian, at the imposition of specially commissioned high court judges for the trials. When called upon to pass judgement on an unconnected case at the end of the final day of trials, Christian took the opportunity to refer to attempts to remove him from the Bench, complaining that the proposal was ‘degrading to myself and injurious to the administration of justice in this place’.⁹ Mr. Bolland, Counsel for the Crown, wrote to Sidmouth on 23rd June with an account of Christian’s address and of his angry and bitter complaints that his name did not appear in any of the newspaper reports as having tried any of the prisoners.¹⁰

Further controversy ensued regarding the fate of some of those convicted for their part in the riots. Peacock notes that, although there had been no public petitions for leniency on behalf of those executed, trouble developed when those originally sentenced to twelve months in Ely goal were suddenly moved to the prison hulks at Sheerness.¹¹ *The Observer* reported that they had been moved ‘for the purpose of being transported for seven years’ and that some of the residents of Ely had resolved to intercede with the

⁹ Philip Warren, ed, *Report of the Trials for Rioting at Ely and Littleport 1816* (Cambridge: Fieldfare Publications, 1997) (Originally published London: Hatfield and Twigg, 1816), p. 73.

¹⁰ DA, 152M/C/1816/OH/21, Unrest – East Anglia: Extract from letter concerning Mr Christian’s ‘chagrin that it was deemed necessary to send ... two of the twelve judges’ to Ely to deal with the rioters – Mr Bolland, 23rd June 1816.

¹¹ A. J. Peacock, *Bread or Blood: A Study of the Agrarian Riots in East Anglia in 1816* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1965), p. 130.

Government on their behalf.¹² A letter in the *Bury and Norwich Post* explained that many respectable inhabitants were concerned by the ‘irritation which the change of sentence had produced in the minds of the lower classes of people’ and had therefore called a meeting. However, having been initially granted permission by the senior magistrate Metcalfe to hold the meeting at the Shire Hall, he was overruled by Bate Dudley, who locked the premises. Metcalfe resigned from the Bench and the local residents were obliged to meet instead at *The Club Inn*.¹³ According to letters in the *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, their meeting drew accusations of disloyalty to the Crown and to Justice and the inhabitants were obliged to defend themselves, stating that their aims were to show the ‘lower orders’ that although determined and unflinching in their support of justice, the inhabitants of Ely ‘were no less feelingly alive to plead in the cause of mercy’.¹⁴ According to Peacock, Bate Dudley maintained that the authorities had made ‘a wise arrangement...about those to be transported and also those to be imprisoned’, but the news of the change in sentence was greeted with horror throughout the area.¹⁵ The pleas of the local inhabitants may have had some impact as the *Bury and Norwich Post* reported on 4th June 1817 that the convicts had been released from Sheerness for good behavior and given money to make their way home.¹⁶ These articles provide a reminder that the rioters were not anonymous strangers, but neighbours and acquaintances of the other inhabitants. They are evidence of a local population attempting to recover from the riots and re-establish a peaceful, united community.

¹² *The Observer*, 28 July 1816, p. 4.

¹³ *BNP*, 7 August 1816.

¹⁴ *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, 2 August 1816.

¹⁵ Peacock, p. 131.

¹⁶ *BNP*, 4 June 1817.

Further insights into the consequences of the riots for the local community can be found in newspaper correspondence regarding the legal case brought by the Revd. Vachell against the Hundred of Ely, claiming damages resulting from the actions of the rioters. This was to have a direct financial impact on the local inhabitants and the Vestry Minute Book for Littleport Parish records that on 16th July 1816 they agreed to pay twenty-two pounds and ten shillings out of the poor rates to defray the costs of contesting Vachell's claim at the ensuing assizes in Cambridge on 5th August.¹⁷ The *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal* reported on 9th August 1816 that Vachell had been awarded the sum of £708 9s.¹⁸ Once Vachell's legal costs were taken into account, the inhabitants received a summons to pay a total of £826 10s.¹⁹ The *Morning Post* commented that the award of damages was 'another of the evil results of those violent proceedings, which have so severely aggravated the distress which they professed to remedy'.²⁰ There followed a long correspondence regarding the unfairness of assessments determining the amount that each district was liable to pay. This still occupied the community months later when a letter appeared in the *Bury and Norwich Post* complaining that 'the College in Ely (with a revenue as reported of 10 or 12,000*l* a year) [was] assessed at no more than five pounds and one penny' whilst the tiny hamlet of Welche's Dam was assessed at six times as much.²¹ Another complained that one of the residents acquitted at the trial, a hardworking man of otherwise good character with a large family to support and an

¹⁷ Cambridgeshire Archives (hereafter CA), P109/8/1, Vestry Minute Book, Littleport Parish Church, 16 July 1816.

¹⁸ *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, 9 August 1816.

¹⁹ CA, 283/L2/2, Award to Revd. Vachell, 2 December 1816.

²⁰ *Morning Post*, 10 August 1816.

²¹ *BNP*, 5 February 1817.

income of only 8s. per week, must pay 12s. and 6d., whilst the Dean and Prebends of Ely Cathedral were charged only 5s. each.²² These letters demonstrate the continuing impact of the riots on the local inhabitants and also suggest a degree of resentment against the Church.

Accounts of Revd. Vachell's standing with his parishioners vary significantly. Peacock claims that Vachell was 'an object of obvious hatred to the labourers', arguing that East Anglian labourers rarely went to church and that clergymen were regarded as opponents of the poor, not least because many of them were magistrates, and identified themselves with the interests of the ruling classes.²³ In contrast Wentworth-Day, describing the efforts which local inhabitants made to alleviate the hardships of their poorer neighbours, refers specifically to Revd. Vachell, who 'boiled down some of his own sheep for the relief of his poor parishioners'.²⁴ This is redolent of those at the top of the local social order fulfilling what Seal refers to as a paternalistic relationship with an unwritten code by which they were responsible for alleviating the cyclical sufferings of the poor.²⁵ Nevertheless, having found himself and his family the object of such violence during the riots and subsequently having been obliged to give evidence in court against many of his neighbours, Vachell evidently felt unable to remain in Littleport. He wrote to Sidmouth in December 1816 appealing for his help as, having fled his parish after over twenty years of doing everything within his power to serve his parishioners,

²² *BNP*, 12 February 1817.

²³ Peacock, pp. 59-61.

²⁴ Wentworth-Day, J., *A History of the Fens* (London: George Harrap, 1954), pp. 213-214.

²⁵ Graham Seal, 'Tradition and Agrarian Protest in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales', *Folklore*, 99, 2 (1988), 146-169, (p. 146).

he was aware that he was obliged by virtue of the 'Residence Bill', which required a Vicar to be resident in his parish, either to return or to resign his living. This, he argued, would place him and his family in a state of extreme hardship. Vachell therefore sought Sidmouth's help in securing another living in the vicinity, which would enable him to reside in this new parish but also retain the living at Littleport.²⁶ It is unclear how Sidmouth responded but, in June 1817, the Bishop of Ely granted Vachell a 'Licence of Absence' from his parish and assigned a stipend to his Curate, the Revd. George Bitton Jermyn in his stead.²⁷ Vachell retained the title of Vicar of Littleport until his death in April 1830, but he never returned to the parish, which remained under the care of a succession of stipendiary curates throughout that time.²⁸

National Debate.

As discussed above, most of the initial reaction to the riots and the subsequent trials in the national press expressed outrage at the actions of the rioters, fear of the spread of unrest, relief at the restoration of order and approval of the actions of the authorities in doing so and bringing the perpetrators to justice. There was, however, coverage in some newspapers that demonstrated some sympathy with the plight of the labourers and criticized the authorities for their contribution to hardship amongst the poor and the way they responded to the unrest.

²⁶ DA, 152M/C/1816/OH/23, Unrest – East Anglia: Hardship of him and his family following events of 27 May in Littleport – J Vachell to Marquis of Salisbury, 29th December 1816.

²⁷ CA, P109/2/1, Licence of absence for John Vachell, 1817.

²⁸ 'Littleport, Cambridgeshire' in *Clergy of the Church of England Database* available at < <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk/> > [accessed 4 December 2019]

The *Liverpool Mercury* published an article laying the blame for the disturbances at the feet of the Government and its taxation policies, particularly the Corn Laws. The article argued that the poor were deprived of bread because farmers, millers and bakers could not afford to sell their produce for a price less than that which would enable them to pay their high taxes. The Government's solution, rather than lowering the price of bread by reducing taxes, was to raise the guaranteed price further, putting the bread out of the labourers' reach altogether. The resulting disturbances now had to be controlled by deployment of an army which should have been disbanded after the war enabling the reduction of taxes.²⁹ It is interesting to read this different perspective on the national situation and William Cobbett took a similar stance in his *Weekly Political Register*. Writing on 6th July, Cobbett reflected on the Prince Regent's speech to Parliament at the end of the parliamentary session, in which he referred to the measures to which he had needed to resort in order to suppress unrest in the kingdom as having 'been productive of the most salutary effects'. His Royal Highness had acknowledged the distress suffered by many people as a result of the impact of the long wars on the country, but stressed that these were now diminishing as a result of the 'progressive improvement of public credit'.³⁰ Cobbett argued that, whilst the Crown's response in sending troops and bringing the perpetrators to justice, had indeed restored order in Ely, the consequences in other parts of the country were very different. 'Fresh tumults' had broken out in several areas, including Frome in Somerset and Loughborough in Leicestershire, with violent

²⁹ *LM*, 31 May 1816.

³⁰ *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register (hereafter CWPR)*, 6 July 1816, p. 4.

confrontations between labourers and yeomanry cavalry, and colliers from Birmingham marching towards London with wagon loads of coal to petition the Prince Regent.³¹ He clearly identifies the fault of the Government in resisting calls to reduce the rate of the property tax in order to ease the burden on farmers and merchants, enabling them to employ more labourers at better rates and to reduce the price of flour for the common good. As Thompson would argue, the established 'moral economy' appeared to have been abandoned, with market forces allowed to prevail. The response of the Littleport rioters was to engage in 'legitimate' popular protest as part of a negotiation with local magistrates to set fair food prices.³² Cobbett predicts that 'unless taxes be diminished, paupers cannot be diminished in number; and, if they go on increasing...[they will] become the masters of the country'.³³ This article is indicative of the dilemma in which the country found itself, on the one hand conscious of the increasing hardships of the poor and its apparent inability to meet the cost of alleviating them, but on the other increasingly fearful of the possible consequences of continued unrest and potential widespread rebellion. This was a world that bore little resemblance to that of Elizabeth I, whose ministers had first introduced the concept of poor relief. Not only was public provision for support for the destitute increasingly resented as too significant a financial pressure, but the growth of large urban areas was fueling a change in the perception of poverty. The public felt increasingly threatened by a faceless urban population and the poor became objects of distrust and fear rather than of compassion. As Lees comments, 'The poor had changed from neighbors in a face-to-face society to strangers who

³¹ *CWPR*, 6 July 1816, p. 6.

³² Thompson, E. P., 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), 76-136, (p. 122).

³³ *CWPR*, 6 July 1816, pp. 8-12.

menaced the respectable through their disorderly lives'.³⁴ This provided the impetus for the appointment in 1816 of a Parliamentary Select Committee to examine the operation of the Poor Laws under pressure to reduce the levels of relief. By January 1817, the Parish Vestry of Littleport had resolved to adopt a system whereby any labourers applying for poor relief would be balloted to be employed by local ratepayers and that their wages would be paid by the overseers.³⁵ It is interesting, therefore, to note the difference in the tone of articles in newspapers in other areas of the country, which largely portray the Littleport rioters as Lees' 'menacing strangers', compared to correspondence in local newspapers in East Anglia, which evidently reflects attitudes amongst local Ely residents to whom the rioters would have been 'neighbours'.

SUMMARY

The evidence discussed above suggests that anxiety to restore order meant that initial reactions to the riots and the response of the authorities were in general positive and supportive, both locally and nationally. However, as time went by, local residents did begin to question and challenge their actions and to come to the defense of both the acquiescent magistrates and the convicted men as attempts were made to heal division in the local community. The riots had a lasting impact on some of the protagonists, not least Revd. Vachell, but also had significant financial implications for the inhabitants of Littleport and Ely. Nationally, this period of unrest contributed to calls for reductions in

³⁴ Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 113

³⁵ CA, P109/8/1, 17 January 1817.

taxation and poor relief and a major review of the poor laws. Reactions in the country as a whole appear to have been motivated by a fear of faceless agitators and potential rebellion. However, the realities of residents reacting to local unrest are more reflective of a community attempting to address the hardships of poorer families and to re-establish cordial and respectful relationships between neighbours.

Chapter 5: Conclusion.

This study set out to consider the events, background and motives surrounding the riots of 22nd and 23rd May 1816 and the reaction of the Establishment, both locally and nationally, to the unrest, asking why the people of Littleport and Ely rioted and why the authorities reacted in the way that they did. Writers have taken widely differing views of these events. Official, contemporary accounts portrayed the rioters as drunken, immoral thugs and agitators. By contrast, local folklore and more recent writers have seen the rioters as champions of the poor who had no other means of influence or protest. By considering the evidence from all available primary sources in the context of the current historiographical debate, this study was able to provide a more balanced analysis of the possible causes of the riots and the response of the authorities.

The primary sources and contemporary accounts considered in chapter two suggested that the riots in Littleport and Ely, although essentially driven by genuine grievances regarding low wages and high food prices, were also used by some as an opportunity to settle old scores and punish unpopular local figures including Henry Martin and Revd. Vachell. The disturbances were met initially by the local magistrates with conciliation, perhaps because of a certain sympathy with the rioters' complaints, but primarily because without military support they had little choice when faced by an armed mob. The suppression which followed from central authorities was swift and violent and

designed both as a refutation of the initial conciliatory response and a significant deterrent to any further public unrest.

The evidence considered in chapter three suggested that the decision of the authorities to hold a Special Assizes was motivated in part by practical concerns for the continuing cost of maintaining security in the area whilst large numbers of prisoners were awaiting trial. However, the Crown's chief motivation appeared to be a desire to re-impose order with a high-profile demonstration of the power of Justice given the pervading atmosphere of fear of widespread insurrection. The trials and subsequent executions were certainly well publicised and received widespread, detailed newspaper coverage around the country. The proceedings managed by the authorities provide a powerful illustration of what Foucault argues were public rituals designed to re-establish order and re-assert the power of the Crown.¹ Accounts of the proceedings and the trial papers prepared by the Treasury Solicitor demonstrate that cases were carefully chosen to ensure that identified 'ringleaders' were convicted for the most serious offences which carried the maximum penalties. The commonly held belief, that anyone not in desperate need themselves who engaged in popular protest did not do so for any altruistic reasons but with sinister motives, singled out these 'ring-leaders'. Their public confessions and expressions of regret at their executions were thus meant to serve as an example to others and prevent any further spread of the disturbances.

¹ Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1991), p. 3.

Chapter four considered the aftermath and legacy of these events and the evidence discussed suggested that anxiety to restore order meant that initial reactions to the riots and the response of the authorities were in general positive and supportive, both locally and nationally. However, as time went by, local residents did begin to question and challenge their actions and to come to the defense of both the acquiescent magistrates and the convicted men as attempts were made to heal division in the local community. The riots had a lasting impact on some of the protagonists, not least Revd. Vachell, but also had significant financial implications for the inhabitants of Littleport and Ely. Nationally, this period of unrest contributed to calls for reductions in taxation and poor relief and a major review of the poor laws. Reactions in the country as a whole appear to have been motivated by a fear of faceless agitators and potential rebellion. However, the realities of residents reacting to local unrest are more reflective of a community attempting to address the hardships of poorer families and to re-establish cordial and respectful relationships between neighbours.

This study has focused largely on the events of May and June 1816 and the immediate aftermath. Given that such events were instrumental in driving calls for a review of long established provisions for poor relief in the country as a whole, resulting ultimately in major changes, less charitable and more draconian in their approach, it would be fitting to explore any available evidence of how such changes were implemented in Littleport and Ely and what the impact was on the local community over the decades that followed.

The evidence considered by the current study has suggested that the riots were both an expression of grievances about financial hardships and an opportunity for individuals to settle old scores. The reaction of the authorities initially conformed to the expectations of Thompson's 'moral economy', but ultimately revealed a desire to demonstrate the power of the Crown in response to genuine fears of widespread insurrection. The suppression and trials received popular support because of such fears, but as local people reflected on events over time, evidence suggests that they became more concerned with healing division and rebuilding their local community.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

CAMBRIDGESHIRE ARCHIVES

283/L/1-28, Ely and Littleport rioters: prosecution papers, 1816

E/QS03, Isle of Ely Quarter Sessions – Minute Book, 18 October 1815 – 4 December 1819

P68/8, Ely St Mary Parish Church - Vestry & Parochial Church Council, 1810-1979

P109/2/1, Licence of absence for John Vachell, 1817

P109/8/1, Vestry Minute Book, Littleport Parish Church, 3 June 1745 – 3 April 1833

P109/25, Littleport Parish Church – Charities and Schools, 1571 – 1943

S/B/SP889, The Bedford Level Corporation – Petition of Certain Landowners and Poor Persons interested in Grunty Fen, 18 April 1810

T/E/AZ254, Act extinguishing the secular jurisdiction of the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of Ely in certain liberties in Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Cambridgeshire (6 and 7 William IV), 17 August 1836

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Add. MS. 4492 C.U.L., Letters from Rev Henry Law, Deacon of Ely, vindication of his conduct in Ely and Littleport Riots, 1816.

EDC 6/2, Ely Dean and Chapter Correspondence

EDC 2/2A/5, Ely Dean and Chapter Order Books for Chapter Meetings

DEVON ARCHIVES, DEVONSHIRE HERITAGE CENTRE

152M/C/1816/OH/16, Unrest – East Anglia: ‘A plain statement of facts relevant to the late Riots which took place at Downham, Littleport and Ely’ – John Vachell, June 1816

152M/C/1816/OH/17, Unrest – East Anglia: Congratulations on the termination of the disturbances – Bishop of Hereford to H.A., 2nd June 1816

152M/C/1816/OH/18, Unrest – East Anglia: Action taken by magistrates against disturbances with particular reference to the role of Mr Law – William Plumer to H.A., 2nd June 1816

152M/C/1816/OH/20, Unrest – East Anglia: Recommendation that Mr Hare be made a Baronet for his conduct during the Norfolk disturbances – Lord Graves to H.A., 8th June 1816

152M/C/1816/OH/21, Unrest – East Anglia: Extract from letter concerning Mr Christian’s ‘chagrin that it was deemed necessary to send ... two of the twelve judges’ to Ely to deal with the rioters – Mr Bolland, 23rd June 1816

152M/C/1816/OH/23, Unrest – East Anglia: Hardship of him and his family following events of 27 May in Littleport – J Vachell to Marquis of Salisbury, 29th December 1816

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

HO/42/150-152, Home Office: Domestic Correspondence, George III. (May-July 1816)

PRO 30/45/1, Henry, Viscount Sidmouth Home Secretary, 11 June 1812-16 Jan 1822: Letters to various or unnamed people, 1816: Sir Henry Bate Dudley requests that convict rioters serve their sentences in the Penitentiary House, rather than in Newgate, 7 July 1816

TS 11/1027/4353, Re: Ely riots: Rex v Henry BENSON for a misdemeanor: Isle of Ely special sessions, 17 June 1816

PRINTED SOURCES

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Abbott, Charles, Gurney, John, & Great Britain. Assizes, *The charge of the Hon. Mr. Justice Abbott, to the Grand Jury of the Isle of Ely : At the special Assizes, holden at Ely, on Monday the 17th of June, 1816, before the Hon. Mr. Justice Burrough, and Edward Christian, Esq. Chief Justice of Ely; together with the speeches of the counsel for the crown ... and the solemn address of Mr. Justice Abbott to the several convicts, on passing sentence of death upon them.* (Ely: J. Clements, 1816) Cam.b.816.4

Broadside B.81.6, *Particulars of the Execution and Confession of the five unfortunate Men.* (North Shields: W. Orange Printer, 1816)

Craik, G., *Sketches of popular tumults: Illustrative of the evils of social ignorance.* (London: C. Knight & Co., 1837) G.26.39

Dennis, J., *Particulars of the execution and confession of the five unfortunate men, John Dennis, George Crow, W. Beamis the elder, T. South the younger, and Isaac Harley: For the horrid and awful crime of rioting. Who were executed at Ely in Cambridgeshire, on Saturday, July 13th, 1816.* (North Shields: W. Orange, 1816) Broadside.B.81.6

Easey, J., & Member of the Inner Temple, *A Full and correct report of the trials for rioting, at Ely and Littleport, in May 1816, before judges Abbott, Burrough, and Christian, at a special assize held at Ely, on Monday, the 17th day of June, and following days, with the opening charge of Mr. Justice Abbott, and the pleadings of counsel at full length, and a prefatory chapter on the state of the country, and the alarming effects of insubordination to the laws.* (London: Hatfield and Twigg, 1816) Cam.d.816.2

PUBLISHED BOOKS

Warren, Philip, ed, *Report of the Trials for Rioting at Ely and Littleport 1816* (Cambridge: Fieldfare Publications, 1997) (Originally published London: Hatfield and Twigg, 1816)

Watson, William, *An Historical Account of the Ancient Town and Port of Wisbech* (Wisbech: H. and J. Leach, 1827)

NEWSPAPERS / PERIODICALS

Caledonian Mercury, Edinburgh
Cambridge Chronicle and Journal
Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, London
Hull Packet
Jackson's Oxford Journal

Lancaster Gazette
Liverpool Mercury
Morning Chronicle, London
Morning Post, London
Royal Cornwall Gazette, Truro
The Bury and Norwich Post Or, Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, Cambridge and Ely Advertiser
The Examiner, London
The Observer
The Times, London
York Herald

PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS & REPORTS

Hansard

House of Commons Parliamentary Papers

Board of Agriculture (Great Britain), *Agricultural state of the Kingdom, in February, March, and April 1816: being the substance of the replies to a circular letter sent by the Board of Agriculture, to every part of the Kingdom*, (London: B. McMillan, 1816)

SECONDARY SOURCES

PUBLISHED BOOKS

Archer, John E., *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England 1780– 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Bakhtin, M. M., *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by H. Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984)

Barrett, W. H., *Tales from the Fens*, ed. by Enid Porter (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963)

Bohstedt, John, *The Politics of Provisions: Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, c. 1550-1850* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010)

Emsley, Clive, *Crime, Police and Penal Policy: European Experiences 1750– 1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1991)

Godfrey, Barry and Paul Lawrence, *Crime and Justice 1750–1950* (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2005)

Johnson, C., *The Ely and Littleport riots: With an account of the trials and executions in 1816*. (Littleport: George T. Watson, 1948) Originally published Ely: C. Johnson, 1893.

Le Bon, Gustave, *The Crowd: Study of the Popular Mind*, 2nd edn (Great Britain: Aristeus Books, 2014)

Lees, Lynn Hollen, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Peacock, A. J., *Bread or Blood: A Study of the Agrarian Riots in East Anglia in 1816* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1965)

Read, Rod, *Rebels with a cause: 1816 Rioting in the fens of Littleport and Ely examined by a local criminologist in 2016* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016)

Rudé, George, *The Face of the Crowd: Studies in Revolution, Ideology and Popular Protest*, ed. by Harvey J. Kaye, (London: Harvester - Wheatsheaf, 1988)

Stevenson, John, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700-1832*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013)

Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 2013)

Wentworth-Day, J., *A History of the Fens* (London: George Harrap, 1954)

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Beik, William, 'The Violence of the French Crowd from Charivari to Revolution', *Past and Present*, 197, 1 (2007), 75-110

Bohstedt, John, 'Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots 1790-1810', *Past and Present*, 120, 1 (1988), 88-122

Calway, Gareth, 'Bread or Blood: Fenland Riots, 200 years on', *Eastern Daily Press*, 20 May 2016

Charlesworth, Andrew, 'The Spatial Diffusion of Riots Popular Disturbances in England and Wales, 1750-1850', *Rural History*, 5, 1 (1994), 1-22

Evans, Eric J., 'Some Reasons for the Growth of English Rural Anti-Clericalism c. 1750 - c. 1830', *Past & Present*, 66, 1 (1975), 84-109

Griffin, Carl J., 'The Violent Captain Swing?', *Past & Present*, 209, 4 (2010), 149-180

Griffin, Carl J., 'The Culture of Combination Solidarities and Collective Action Before Tolpuddle', *The Historical Journal*, 58, 2 (2015), 443-480

Hay, Douglas, 'Crime and Justice in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England', *Crime and Justice*, 2 (1980), 45-84

Jones, Peter, 'Finding Captain Swing: Protest, Parish Relations, and the State of the Public Mind in 1830', *International Review of Social History*, 54, 3 (2009), 429-458

Jones, Peter, 'Swing, Speenhamland and Rural Social Relations: The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Nineteenth Century', *Social History*, 32, 3 (2007) 271-290

Muskett, Paul, 'The East Anglian agrarian riots of 1822', *Agricultural History Review*, 32, 1 (1984) 1-13

Reay, Barry, 'The Last Rising of the Agricultural Labourers: The Battle in Bossenden Wood, 1838', *History Workshop*, 26 (1988), 79-101

Rogers, Nicholas, 'Review: By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England, 1700-1880 by Bob Bushaway', *The American Historical Review*, 93, 2 (1988), 415-416

Rudé, George, 'Protest and Punishment in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 5,1 (1973), 1-23

Seal, Graham, 'Tradition and Agrarian Protest in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales', *Folklore*, 99, 2 (1988), 146-169

Thompson, E. P., 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), 76-136

Tilly, Charles, 'Review: Moral Economy and Popular Protest: Crowds, Conflict and Authority by Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 31, 2 (2000), 259-260

Veale, Lucy and Georgina H. Endfield, 'Situating 1816, the 'year without summer', in the UK', *The Geographical Journal*, 182, 4 (2016), 318-330

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Atkinson, T.D., Ethel M. Hampson, E.T. Long, C.A.F. Meekings, Edward Miller, H.B. Wells and G.M.G. Woodgate, 'City of Ely: Nineteenth and twentieth centuries', in *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely: Volume 4, City of Ely, Ely N. and S. Witchford and Wisbech Hundreds* ed. by R.B. Pugh (London: Victoria County

History, 2002) pp. 45-47 available at < <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol4/pp45-47>> [accessed 29 December 2018]

'Littleport, Cambridgeshire' in *Clergy of the Church of England Database* available at < <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk/>> [accessed 4 December 2019]

Linthicum, Kent, "'Bread or Blood": Climate Insecurity in East Anglia in 1816', in *HistoricalClimatology.com/blog* (2017) available at < <http://www.historicalclimatology.com/blog/bread-or-blood-climate-insecurity-in-east-anglia-in-1816>> [accessed 5 May 2019]

Porter, Enid, 'Notebooks', in *Enid Porter Project* (2014) available at < <http://www.enidporterproject.org.uk/content/category/enid-porter/enid-porters-notebooks> > [accessed 19 May 2019]

COURSE MATERIALS

Emsley, Clive, 'Block 4: Crime, police and penal policy', *A825 MA History Part 1*, (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2009), pp. 7-34

Lawrence, Paul, 'Block 6: Poverty and welfare', *A825 MA History Part 1*, (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2009), pp. 7-38

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND ISLE OF ELY EDUCATION COMMITTEE. ARCHIVE TEACHING UNIT

Riot and be hanged: Ely and Littleport 1816, a study in miniature of a divided society; an archive unit on the Ely and Littleport riots of 1816 compiled by a working party of teachers in Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely, Cambridgeshire and Isle of ELY (County). Education Committee. Archive teaching units; 1, (Cambridge: Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely Education Committee, 1971) C.U.L. Cam.a.241.5.1

UNPUBLISHED THESES

Amos, S. W., 'Social discontent and Agrarian disturbances in Essex, 1795-1850', (unpublished M.A. thesis, Durham University, 1971) available at Durham E-Theses Online: <<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/10399/>>

Hill, Judith, 'Poverty, unrest and the response in Surrey, 1815-1834', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Roehampton University, 2006) available at EThOS: <<https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.558239>>

Maynard, John, 'The Agricultural Labourer in Worcestershire: Responses to Economic Change and Social Dislocation 1790 – 1841', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Coventry University, 2005)

available at EThOS: <<https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.418337>>

Younger, Katharine Margaret, 'Acts of protest in Central Southern England, c.1780-c.1830', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Winchester, 2011)

available at EThOS: <<https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.549633>>