

**A 'Knife and Fork, Bread and Cheese' Question?: Investigating  
motivations behind the support for Chartism in Llanidloes in  
1839.**

**Nick Venti**

**BA (Honours) in History**

**MA in History**

**Date of Submission: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

**Word Count: 15,927**

## **Abstract**

This dissertation is an attempt to understand the motivations of the participants in a Chartist riot that took place in the small market town of Llanidloes, mid-Wales, in the early days of agitation that accompanied the finalisation and submission of the first National Petition to Parliament in the Spring of April 1839. The riot formed no part of any grand Chartist plan of 'ulterior measures', rather it was an accidental outbreak of violence, provoked by the actions of the local magistracy. But the event generated a body of paperwork that gives insight into the backgrounds and life experience of a cohort of local Chartist activists, both men and women, which, when combined with additional evidence on the state of the dominant local woollen industry, reveals a prevailing picture of economic precariousness. The dissertation argues that a large section of the local population was experiencing what, in modern phraseology, might be deemed a 'cost of living crisis'; one that was being exacerbated by the simultaneous introduction of the New Poor Law, with its threat of further penalising them for the state of poverty in which they found themselves. The dissertation looks into the initial local working of the New Poor Law through the study of early records of the Poor Law Union created for the area, to assess the impact of the change on the traditional administration of parochial support to workers in the local wool trade, in order to trace evidence on the state of local feeling to the new poor law regime. It concludes that the twin pressures of economic distress and the reduction of parochial support were significant drivers of support for the political reform message of Chartism, and that in Llanidloes the Peoples Charter was very much a 'knife and fork, bread and cheese question', embodying a strong continuation of anti-poor law sentiment within its make-up.

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## **Personal Statement**

I declare that this dissertation for A826 is all my own unaided work. Though the work covers a topic that I have examined previously within my BA degree at the Open University, no part of the present work has been submitted previously as part of that degree with the Open University, nor has any part of it been submitted to any other academic institution. Parts of this dissertation do, however, build on work that I submitted for assessment at the close of A825.

## Introduction

An attempt to arrest ten members of the Llanidloes Political Union on 30 April 1839 ended in riot. A motley array of three Metropolitan Policemen, a handful of constables from neighbouring towns in the Severn Valley and over a hundred special constables hastily sworn in by the local magistrates proved unable to prevent a surging angry mob from storming the Trewythen Arms Hotel, into which the forces of law and order had retreated after making three initial arrests. With the prisoners released, the hotel wrecked and the London and local policemen roughed up and sent packing, the Chartists remained in control of the town for five days until Regular and Yeomanry troops arrived to restore order.<sup>1</sup> At the summer assizes that followed in July, guilty verdicts were brought in against thirty-one men and women, three of whom received sentences of transportation and the remainder prison sentences ranging from two months to one year with hard labour.<sup>2</sup>

The riot has been variously seen as having been provoked by the local borough magistrates and as an anti-police riot in reaction to the presence of the Metropolitan Police, rather than as an overt manifestation of 'physical force' Chartism.<sup>3</sup> But it was certainly an event that revealed the extent of social fracture in Llanidloes, itself a microcosm of wider dissent and growing antagonism between parties and classes across the country as a whole. But what were the factors that lay behind the cleavage in social relations locally, and how great an emphasis should be placed on changes to the Poor Law in fostering support for the People's Charter, so graphically demonstrated on the streets of Llanidloes in 1839?

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Aston, 'Chartism in Mid Wales', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, Vol.62 (1971). pp.18-19.

<sup>2</sup> 'Montgomery Assizes', *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 19 July 1839, pp.2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Ashton p.27; Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A new history*, (Manchester University Press, 2007). p.74.

Following their trial in July, the prisoners incarcerated in Montgomery Gaol petitioned for a mitigation of their sentences on the grounds of the 'peculiar state of our feelings at the time the act was committed'.<sup>4</sup> The reasoned argument that follows reads more like a political manifesto than an acceptance of their guilt. The prisoners were all 'working men (though three of them were working women) living entirely by our own labour'. That labour brought in seven shillings in wages for an eighty-hour working week and, 'upon so small a sum we can scarcely maintain ourselves and families'. Referring back to the Reform Bill of 1832 they claimed that, 'we were taught to look forward to an improvement in our condition by some judicious alteration of the Laws', but, 'after several years' trial we have found it quite useless'. The petition then cuts to the heart of the Chartist message:

*'We upon examination found that all Classes of Her Majesty's Subjects were represented but ourselves; finding that those who were represented in the House of Commons had their interests protected, we were anxious to have our only property (our labour) protected likewise, and we joined in the Petition for Universal Suffrage...'*

Then follows a show of contrition for the events at Llanidloes, before the petition concludes with a heart-felt apostrophe on the main theme. They felt their 'condition gradually becoming worse', and as a consequence, 'that some alteration in the Laws for the protection of the Labourer and Mechanic must soon take place'.

The wording of this petition, which contains strong echoes of the National Petition of the People's Charter, needs to be read in the context of Chartist rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> In his essay on the 'Language of Chartism', Gareth Stedman Jones has pointed out how Chartist orators adapted traditional radical themes to the changing social condition of the working classes to engender mass support for the movement for political

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<sup>4</sup> The National Archives, HO18/5/28, *Home Office Criminal Petitions Series II: Petition of the Prisoners Confined at Montgomery Gaol*.

<sup>5</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p.22.

reform.<sup>6</sup> In Chartist speak, the hardships suffered by the 'Industrious Classes' arose through the monopolising of political power by the propertied and 'idle' classes – namely the aristocracy and, after the passing of the Reform Bill, the middle class. Lacking in any property of their own other than their labour and caught in a vicious cycle where 'monopolisers' introduced 'Starvation Laws' - such as the Poor Law Amendment Act (PLAA) - that impacted on their ability to make ends meet and penalised them for being poor, the Chartist argument held that, 'poverty and oppression could only be removed with the abolition of the monopoly of law making'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, by identifying the lack of political representation as the cause of the 'social oppression' under which they suffered, the People's Charter was able to, 'concentrate the discontent of the unrepresented working classes upon one common aim'.<sup>8</sup> As Asa Briggs has remarked, it was quite an achievement for Chartist orators like Fergus O'Connor to know, 'how to talk effectively to despairing...workers...more interested during 1837 in the threat of the New Poor Law...than a political panacea'.<sup>9</sup>

The link between support for the Charter and reaction against the PLAA is strongly made within the historiography of Chartism. Speaking of Wales, David Jones has linked much of the popular anger associated with Chartism to attacks on Guardians and workhouses in the early years of the implementation of the New Poor Law.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the language of anti-poor law agitation, exemplified by the 'apocalyptic promptings of Stephens', carried through into Chartism and ensured that it, 'remained closely identified with the Poor Law question'.<sup>11</sup> Dorothy

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<sup>6</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The Language of Chartism' in James Epstein and others, *The Chartist Experience*, (Macmillan, London 1982). p.6.

<sup>7</sup> Stedman Jones, p.18; Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (Aldershot, Wildwood House, 1986). p.29.

<sup>8</sup> Stedman Jones, p.38

<sup>9</sup> Asa Briggs, 'The Local Background of Chartism' in Asa Briggs and others, *Chartist Studies*, (London, Macmillan, 1977). p.10.

<sup>10</sup> David Jones, *Chartism and Chartists*, (London, Penguin, 1975). p.155.

<sup>11</sup> Jones, p.121.

Thompson identifies the PLAA as one of the controversial acts of the Reformed Parliament that 'roused the most sustained reaction in the country, and led directly into the Chartist movement'.<sup>12</sup> Characterised in Cobbett's phrase as the "Poor Man's Robbery Bill", the Act seemed designed to force people to work, 'at any wage rather than starve', and to drive the cheaper labour of women and children into the labour market.<sup>13</sup> For Thompson, the impact of the PLAA on the family unit, both in terms of forcing more women and children into the factory system, and through the segregation of the workhouse (not to mention the discriminatory bastardy clauses of the Act), was a mainspring for the active involvement of women in agitation against the PLAA, and later in Chartism.<sup>14</sup>

Michael Edwards, biographer of the notorious anti-poor law campaigner Joseph Rayner Stephens (from whom the 'knife and fork, bread and cheese' quotation of the title of this work is borrowed), highlights this aspect of the PLAA, with its tendency to 'destroy the right of the poor to maintenance' and undermine 'the whole fabric of society', as the motivation for Stephens' characterisation of the Act as 'the deadliest exhalation from the pit of hell', and to declare it unconstitutional and therefore not to be obeyed.<sup>15</sup> Stephens and other anti-poor law campaigners are recognised as some of Chartism's most violent voices, and Thompson draws parallels between their rhetoric, with its direct calls for defiance and resistance, to older forms of popular protest, such as food riots and incendiarism.<sup>16</sup> However, though recognising the long tradition of riotous language and posturing within radicalism in both the physical and moral force wings of Chartism, she tends to view such language largely as a bluff - recognised as such by the authorities - and

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<sup>12</sup> Thompson, *Chartism*, p.28.

<sup>13</sup> Thompson, *Chartism*, p.29; p.34.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, *Chartism*, p.34.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Edwards, *Purge this Realm: A Life of Joseph Rayner Stephens*, (London Epworth Press, 1994), p.70.

<sup>16</sup> Dorothy Thompson, *The Early Chartists*, (London, Macmillan, 1971), p.18.



contrasts it with the restraint shown by Chartists even in the midst of riot.<sup>17</sup> Though she uses Llanidloes as an example – the rioters might have broken windows and furniture, but they left the wine cellar untouched – one can argue that there was enough violence on display during the riot to justify the fears of the local authorities. The language of Chartism certainly placed magistrates on their guard and served to prompt the police action that provoked the riot in Llanidloes. As Eileen Yeo notes, the arrest of Stephens in the winter of 1838 on charges of sedition both outraged the Chartist movement and ‘seemed like an opening shot in a campaign of Government oppression’.<sup>18</sup> Though difficult to verify, it is of note that some sources mention a brief appearance of Stephens in Llanidloes just ten days before the riot occurred.<sup>19</sup>

In the chapters that follow, we will seek to examine the social make-up and life experience of the Llanidloes Chartists, in order to try and gauge how their reaction to local economic circumstances and to the amendment of the Poor Law were instrumental in motivating support for the radical reform agenda of Chartism.

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<sup>17</sup> Thompson, *Early Chartists*, p.17; p.19.

<sup>18</sup> Eileen Yeo, ‘Christianity in Chartist Struggle, 1838-1842’ in Stephen Jones and others, *The People’s Charter*, (London, Merlin Press, 2003). p.67.

<sup>19</sup> Ronald Morris, *Chartism in Llanidloes 1838-1839*, (Llanidloes, 1989). p.50; Islwyn Nicholas, *One Hundred Years Ago*, (Aberystwyth, Gwasg y Seren Goch, 1939). p.20.

## Chapter One: Who were the Llanidloes Chartists?

The thirty-one people from Llanidloes convicted at the Montgomeryshire Assizes in July 1839 provide a representative sample of the Chartist movement in the town.

The sample is small, as those convicted were far from acting alone. The Political Union boasted a membership of some six hundred and the numbers involved in the riot of 30 of April were estimated by witnesses at upwards of a thousand.<sup>1</sup>

Support for Chartism was also not confined to Llanidloes; three Chartists from the neighbouring town of Newtown were convicted at the Assizes, one being transported for 'training and drilling', the other two receiving custodial sentences for throwing stones at the Yeomanry as it passed through the town on the way to re-establish order at Llanidloes.<sup>2</sup> The man singled out as the leader of the regional Chartist Movement, Thomas Powell, a recently bankrupt Welshpool ironmonger, also received a sentence of one year's imprisonment for supposedly inciting the use of 'physical force' in support of the presentation of the National Petition.<sup>3</sup>

Records relating to the trial and incarceration of these local Chartists provide insight into the life experience of this unfortunate cohort of men and women, revealing details of their professions, family status and age, as well as their educational attainment and economic circumstances. When combined with contemporary Parliamentary enquires into the trade and industry of the area, local Census returns, newspaper reports and correspondence between local magistrates and central government, we can begin to build a picture of what, in Engels famous phrase, might be described as the 'condition' of the working class of Llanidloes at the time of the Chartist agitation of 1839.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (TNA), ASSI 65 Assizes: North and South Wales Circuit, Chester and North Wales Division: Criminal Depositions. Testimony of T.E. Marsh, 16 May 1839.

<sup>2</sup> 'Montgomeryshire Assizes', *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 19 July 1839, pp.2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Owen Ashton, 'Chartism in mid-Wales', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, Vol 62 (1971), pp.23-24.

**Table 1.1: Chartist prisoners confined in Montgomery Gaol, distilled from 'Petition of the Prisoners Confined at Montgomery Gaol'.<sup>4</sup>**

Name	Age	Sentence	Family	Trade	Remarks
<b>Llanidloes</b>					
John Lewis (Cripplegate)	40	1yr hard labour	Wife & 5 Children	Weaver	Family on the Parish
John Lewis (Tato)	26	"	Single	Spinner	
John Evans	23	"	Wife	Tailor	
James Jenkins	45	6mths	Wife & 6 Children	Spinner	Family on Parish
Valentine Rowlands	35	"	Wife & 5 Children	Weaver	"
Daniel Jarman	37	"	Wife & 2 Children	"	Family maintained by friends
John Jones	26	"	Wife & 3 Children	"	Family on Parish
Thomas Morgan	32	"	Wife & 3 Children	Spinner	Family maintained by friends
John Evans	24	"	Wife & 2 Children	"	"
Edward George	27	"	Wife & 5 Children	"	Family on Parish
William Richards	18	"	Single	Tailor	
Giles Richards	16	"	"	Weaver	
David Morris	21	"	"	Spinner	
William Jones	20	"	"	Weaver	
Richard Thomas	19	"	"	"	
Elizabeth Lucas	47	"	Widow, 2 Children	"	Family maintained by the Parish
Margaret Meredith	33	"	Widow, 3 Children	Spinner	"
Ann Williams	19	"	Single	Labourer	4 Brothers and Sisters on Parish
John Thomas	48	3mths hard labour	Wife & 8 Children	Weaver	Receive some parish relief
David Jones	27	"	Single	Carder	
Thomas Hamer	21	"	"	Weaver	
David Hamer	56	"	Wife & 4 Children	"	Maintained by Friends
John Nicholas	26	"	Single	Spinner	
Benjamin Davies	27	"	"	"	
Edward Morgan	23	"	"	"	

<sup>4</sup> TNA, HO18/5/28, *Home Office Criminal Petitions Series II: Petition of the Prisoners Confined at Montgomery Gaol.*

Name	Age	Sentence	Family	Trade	Remarks
Evan Mantle	53	“	Wife & 7 Children	Weaver	Part of family on the parish
Richard Hughes	31	2mths hard labour	Wife & 2 Children	“	All the family on the parish
John Evans	35	“	Wife & 5 Children	“	“
<b>Newtown</b>					
William Owen	25	6mths hard labour	Do & 1 Child	“	
Joseph Jenkins	21	“	Single	“	

**Table 1.2 – Chartist Prisoners Transported.<sup>5</sup>**

Name	Age	Transportation	Family	Trade	Remarks
<b>Llanidloes</b>					
Abraham Owen	49	7 years	Widower, 4 Children	Weaver	Convicted of ‘training and drilling’. Able to read and write ‘imperfectly’
Lewis Humphreys	29	7 years	Wife & 1 child	Boot maker	Convicted of ‘training and drilling’. Able to read.
James Morris	20	15 years	Single	Weaver	Convicted of ‘feloniously stabbing with intent to do bodily harm’. Able to read only. Conditional pardon 1847
<b>Newtown</b>					
John Ingram	36	7yrs	Single	Labourer / soldier	Convicted of ‘training and drilling’. Able to read only. Died Jan 1841

Table 1 gives the information held by the authorities on the prisoners in Montgomery Gaol who petitioned for clemency soon after the July Assizes. The supplementary Table 1.2 gives additional information on the four men transported for their part in the events at Llanidloes and Newtown. Analysis of the data in these tables suggests a strong correlation between Chartist agitation in Llanidloes

<sup>5</sup> Compiled from information in Brian Owen, *Transportation by Montgomeryshire Courts 1788–1868* (Powysland Club: Llanidloes, 2003), pp.99-100; p.104; p.107.

and the principal industrial activity of the Severn Valley, the manufacture of *gwlanen* (flannel) woollen cloth. Fully 85% of those convicted at the July Assizes were directly involved in the primary manufacturing process (carders 3%, spinners 29% and weavers 53%), while the next highest employment group, tailors (6%), were involved in the making of secondary products from the cloth produced by the former. Only three of those convicted (two labourers and a bootmaker) were not directly connected with the local woollen trade.

Before drawing too swift a conclusion from this evident correlation between those convicted for Chartist agitation and their involvement in a particular industry, it would be as well to look at the wider context of employment in Llanidloes around the time of the Chartist outbreak. We can do this by investigating the nature of employments in the wider Llanidloes parish, as identified at the time of the 1841 Census drawn up just two years after the riot. Table 1.3 below distils the information available on professions to focus in on the three largest employment groupings of 'flannel manufacturing', 'farming' and 'domestic service', with all other employments being shown combined. It is worth noting that the highest employments after that of domestic servant are general labourers (56) and boot and shoemakers (39). The table also indicates the residual, 'economically inactive' elements of the population, which at 65% is both very high and predominantly made up of younger people. The link between economic inactivity and high population growth in the town will be investigated later. Suffice it to say for now that many of those so recorded by the census enumerators may well have played a much more economically active but unrecorded role in the domestic economy of the home, through casual or intermittent labour in the local industries.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Steven King and Geoffrey Timmins, *Making Sense of the Industrial Revolution*, (Manchester University Press, 2001), p.298.

**Table 1.3 Occupations in the Parish of Llanidloes in 1841 derived from Census data.<sup>7</sup>**

LLANIDLOES PARISH	Male		Female		Total
	Over 20	Under 20	Over 20	Under 20	
<b>Total Domestic Servants</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>173</b>
Agriculture Labourer	93	25	0	0	118
Farmer Grazier	90	0	4	0	94
<b>Total in Agriculture</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>212</b>
Flannel Manufacturer	17	4	9	11	41
Fuller	20	0	0	0	20
Spinner	44	10	66	4	124
Weaver	164	58	82	39	343
Woollen & Cloth Manufacturer	32	11	50	0	93
Yarn Winder	1	0	14	0	15
<b>Total Woollen Manufacturing</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>636</b>
<b>Total Other Occupations</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>455</b>
<b>Total Economically Active</b>	<b>849</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>1476</b>
Independent means	16	2	10	0	28
Paupers	4	0	1	0	5
Residual Population	113	885	808	946	2752
<b>Total Economically inactive</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>887</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>946</b>	<b>2785</b>
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>982</b>	<b>1036</b>	<b>1158</b>	<b>1085</b>	<b>4261</b>

From Table 1.3 it can be extrapolated that, while 85% of the Chartists prisoners were involved in the wool trade, that trade provided just 43% of the recorded professional activities of the economically active part of the population of Llanidloes parish in 1841. Looking at just those identified as weavers and spinners in the Census figures, this percentage of the economically active population falls

<sup>7</sup> Compiled using Census data from, A Vision of Britain through Time: Llanidloes O41area, Industry Statistics, Total employed in all industries, [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/12783050/cube/INDUSTRY\\_TOT](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/12783050/cube/INDUSTRY_TOT) (Date accessed: 26th June 2023).

even further to just 23% and 8.5% respectively. It seems safe to conclude therefore that there was a strong causal link between the local experience in a dominant industry and the growth of support for the radical political reform agenda of Chartism; a finding in line with the identification of textile weavers as, 'by far the greatest occupational group in Chartism', that is well documented in the historiography of the movement.<sup>8</sup>

The above tables also reveal the substantial role played by women in the local flannel industry and their concomitant involvement in Chartism. Dorothy Thompson has remarked that, 'though not exceptional, women prisoners were rare', and she points to Llanidloes as an example where this did happen.<sup>9</sup> Nor were Elizabeth Lucas, Margaret Meredith and Ann Williams, the only women prosecuted for involvement in the events of 30 April. At the Spring Assizes of 1840, a further eight chartists, including three women, (Susan Owen, Maria Hodgkiss and Mary Williams) were convicted and bound over to keep the peace on recognizances of £20-£30, until summoned for sentencing.<sup>10</sup> No details of the professions of these additional local Chartists are available, nor is it clear from available record sets whether they were able to pay such sureties and escape a period of confinement. But the presence of women in such numbers amongst those prosecuted – some 15% of the total – supports the importance of the participation of women in the movement recognised by Dorothy Thompson and others. If the testimony brought against Margaret Meredith at her trial is anything to go by – she told a witness she, 'did her best at the Trewythen' and that she would, 'fight until she was up to her

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<sup>8</sup> Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (Aldershot, Wildwood House, 1986). p.112.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, p.120; p.141.

<sup>10</sup> TNA ASSI/61 Assizes: North and South Wales Circuit, Chester and North Wales Division: Crown Minute Books.

\*\*\*\* in blood' - neither should we underestimate the strength of conviction they brought to Chartism.<sup>11</sup>

Though additional information can be gleaned from the tables above, for the moment we need to draw in other primary source evidence to provide insight into conditions in the local woollen industry that may have contributed to the local allegiance to Chartism. A key document is the report on hand-loom weavers in Wales drawn up by the Assistant Commissioner, William Miles, as part of the evidence gathering process for the Royal Commission on Hand-Loom Weavers. The report, dated 16 March 1839, is particularly strong on conditions in Newtown, which Miles visited and where he conducted interviews with a cross-section of witnesses able to give information on the state of the local woollen trade. By contrast, for Llanidloes he relies primarily upon the evidence of the local vicar, the Reverend Evan Pugh, who comes across as more prone to moralising over the failings of his flock than describing the conditions under which they laboured. Given that he was new to the parish, having only been appointed early in 1838, it seems curious that he was deemed a suitable witness to provide evidence to the Commission.<sup>12</sup>

The report provides an initial overview of the flannel trade in the region, which was in a state of flux following the break-up of the age-old monopoly maintained by the Shrewsbury Drapers. Recent developments had seen the establishment of local markets at both Newtown and Llanidloes to better regulate the measuring and sale of the 'pieces' of flannel produced by local manufacturers.<sup>13</sup> The inference is that the breaking-up of the monopoly had led to the trade becoming more

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<sup>11</sup> 'Montgomeryshire Assizes', *Shrewsbury Chronicle* 19 July 1839, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 19 January, 1838, p.3.

<sup>13</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers, Reports from Assistant Hand-loom Weavers' Commissioners, Part V. Report by W.A. Miles*, (London, House of Commons, 1840). p.554.



'industrialised', for though elements of a proto-industrial system of weaving as a supplement to the farm economy were still evident in rural parts of Montgomeryshire - in the village of Llanbrynmair, for example, where agricultural labourers were employed as much for their ability to spin and weave as handle livestock - in Newtown and Llanidloes the trade was dominated by 'master manufacturers' maintaining multiple looms. Though mechanisation had been introduced to the 'finishing' of cloth and to the preparatory processes of carding and spinning wool into yarn, the weaving part of the trade remained very much a handicraft. An experiment with power-looms in Newtown had proved unsuccessful and the hand-loom was deemed preferable to maintain the perceived finer quality of Welsh flannel.<sup>14</sup> According to evidence from Newtown, there had been no opposition to the trial of the power-loom, though this statement is somewhat contradicted by correspondence that passed between the Lord Lieutenant of the county and the Home Secretary at the time another such trial was being projected at Llanidloes. The Lord Lieutenant forwarded on a letter written to local magistrate, George Meares, by the Factory Inspector, T. Jones Howell, concerning the sending of threatening letters and clandestine meetings at a house of an employee - which combined with an overheard conversation between two weavers, seemed to imply a threat to the life of the manufacturer concerned.

*'With reference to this subject, in one of the factories at Newtown while I was in it, one man who was working there said, "I hear D<sup>d</sup> Davies has ensured all his property," – his companion replied by the pithy interrogatory, "has he ensured his life?"'*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.555.

<sup>15</sup> TNA, HO 52/27, *Home Office: Counties Correspondence*, Piece 339. Letter from T.J. Howells to George Meares, 25 May 1835.

The vast majority of the flannel produced in the local factories was for the home market, the principal purchasers of the cloth being buyers from London. This was in contrast to the wool districts in the north of England, which produced greater volumes of 'coarse goods', principally for sale to international markets where the risks were greater but profits higher. However, whenever the export trade was 'dull', the northern manufacturers often invaded the local market to the detriment of Welsh manufacturers who, bedevilled by lack of capital, were unable to hold stock and ride out any glut in the home market.<sup>16</sup> An additional aspect to the volatility of the trade locally was the aspiration of weavers to become small masters, a process which had been initially favoured by, 'facilities afforded by the Branch Manchester Bank in discounting their bills', but had led to ruin for many when the bank suddenly imposed restrictions on the onset of a banking crisis in 1836 and stopped supporting the 'bill credit system' of trade credits between manufacturers and merchants that was the common form of transaction in the trade.<sup>17</sup>

Table 1.4 suggests that the predilection of hand-loom weavers to join the ranks of small masters was greater in Newtown than in Llanidloes, where there were considerably fewer but larger concerns, though the number of looms and employees in each town was largely the same. It will be noted that the stated total weaving workforce in Llanidloes given in this table is significantly greater than that given by the Census of 1841 in Table 1.3. This may be an indication of 'seasonality' in the weaving trade, dependent on the time of year each return was created, or indicative of one of the periods of economic downturn in the textile industry which, as Malcolm Chase has noted, punctuated the political mobilisation

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<sup>16</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.555

<sup>17</sup> Michael Collins, 'Monetary Policy and the Supply of Trade Credit 1830-1844', *Economica*, 45, (1978), p.382.

of support for Chartism.<sup>18</sup> Other differences discernible in the table is the higher percentage of women weavers employed in Newtown (33%) as opposed to Llanidloes (21%), and conversely the higher reliance upon the labour of children in Llanidloes (13%) in comparison to Newtown (5%).

**Table 1.4: Number of Manufacturers, Looms and Weavers employed in Newtown & Llanidloes in 1838-1839.**<sup>19</sup>

Size of Manufacturer	Location		No. of Employees Newtown			No. of Employees Llanidloes		
	Newtown	Llanidloes	Male	Female	Children	Male	Female	Children
< 5	17		33	23	2			
5 to 10	28	2	120	52	8	7	8	5
11 to 15	14	4	112	53	11	48	1	16
16 to 20	6	3	65	54	2	50	5	5
21 to 30	6	5	75	37	9	103	22	15
31 to 40	1	5	21	7	3	130	40	30
41 to 50		5				150	75	25
> 50		1				35	15	10
<b>Manufacturers</b>	72 <sup>†</sup>	25 <sup>†</sup>						
<b>Total Looms</b>	716*	795						
<b>Average looms</b>	10	32						
<b>Break down of Employees =</b>			426	226	35	523	166	106
<b>Total Employees =</b>				687			795	
<b>Average Employees / Manufacturer =</b>				10			32	
<sup>†</sup> No figures given for 2 additional manufacturers in Newtown. 20 additional looms run by small manufacturers in Llanidloes. * of which 688 employed								

The difference in the proportion of child labour between the two towns may be accounted for by the high number of prosecutions of manufacturers that had occurred in Newtown in the early days of the Factories Regulations Act of 1833. The *Shrewsbury Chronicle* reported fully sixteen prosecutions relating to 'excessive labour' of children at a petty sessions held in Newtown in December 1834, whilst the *True Sun* printed an extract from T. Jones Howell's annual report

<sup>18</sup> Malcom Chase, *Chartism: A New History*, (Manchester University Press, 2007). p.20.

<sup>19</sup> Distilled from the tables in, *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.555; p.565.

for 1836 suggestive of the care the Inspector took in making numerous surprise visits to Newtown factories to check on claims that children were working in them during the night - the upshot of which was two further prosecutions.<sup>20</sup>

In Llanidloes, conversely, there seem to have been few prosecutions, and these mainly related to incorrect record keeping concerning the ages of children employed.<sup>21</sup> The presence of larger manufacturers in the town may also have meant that they were better able to cope with the educational requirements of the Factories Act. In January 1839, the inspector reported that some 30-40 children employed in two of the larger Llanidloes factories attended a day school for two hours each day on top of their eight hours labour, though he goes on to undercut the value of the educational experience available in his district by suggesting that it consisted of little more than:

*'two hours every day with a tattered spelling-book in their hands in some room which is called a school, under the valueless tuition of the overlooker's wife or daughter, or of some other ignorant person who is metamorphosed into a teacher for the purpose of a literal compliance with the educational provisions of the Factories Act'.<sup>22</sup>*

The evidence in regard to the age at which children were employed in Llanidloes is contradictory. The Reverend Pugh stated that, 'children are taken to the factories at about from nine to twelve', whilst the local magistrate George Meares, in answer to a question posed by the Commissioners investigating the operation of the Poor Laws six years earlier - around the time when the provisions of the Factories Act were coming into force - suggested that it was later, 'at fourteen years of age, if

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<sup>20</sup> *Shrewsbury Chronicle* 19 December 1834, p.3; *The True Sun*, 1 April 1837, p.4.

<sup>21</sup> *Factories. A return of the Number and Names of Persons Summoned for Offences Against the Factories Act, 1838-1839*, (London, House of Commons, 1839), pp.50-51.

<sup>22</sup> *Report from Four Factory Inspectors on Effects of Educational Provisions of the Factories Act, Joint Report*, (London, House of Commons, 1839), p.19.

employment can be had (and the only employment is in the flannel manufactories)', adding that, 'very little employment can be had for boys under that age in this country'.<sup>23</sup> Additional evidence is lacking in support of either claim, but it noticeable that the Reverend Pugh was seemingly ignorant of the presence of the day school for factory children in Llanidloes. Commenting on the state of education amongst the weavers, 'who constitute the bulk of our population', he emphasised that one of the effects of their poverty was that they are, 'unable to pay for the education of their children'.<sup>24</sup> In his opinion, the moral condition of the town would only be raised by 'a course of sound religious education', one presided over not be the Dissenting part of the community, who had, 'been sole monopolists of the spiritual interests of this place for the last thirty years', but rather one 'conducted under the auspices of the Established Church'.<sup>25</sup>

**Table 1.5: Educational opportunities in Llanidloes 1833**

Denomination	Day Schools	Sunday Schools	Attendance		
			Males	Females	Combined
Private	5		128	77	205
Established Church		1	60	110	170
Calvinistic Methodists		9			1101
Wesleyan Methodists		3	160	280	440
Baptists		3	120	104	224
Independents		1	42	77	119
<b>Total =</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>510</b>	<b>648</b>	<b>2259</b>

In truth, the Established Church had some catching up to do for, as can be extrapolated from an 1833 report on the state of education in England of Wales, it was responsible for only 7.5% of those receiving education in the town – Table 1.5. This figure rises slightly to 9% if account is taken of the fact that roughly only a

<sup>23</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.563; *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Enquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, (London, House of Commons, 1834), p.654a.

<sup>24</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.563

<sup>25</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.564

third of the reported figures from Dissenting Sunday Schools relate to children under fourteen, the rest being adults, 'engaged in reading, repeating portions of Scriptures or catechisms from memory, intermixed with praying and singing, making them, upon the whole, religious meetings rather than Schools'.<sup>26</sup>

The value of the education imparted by such means is difficult to judge, but we can gain some insight in relation to the cohort of Chartist prisoners detained at Montgomery Gaol. Table 1.2 notes that all three of the transportees from Llanidloes had some ability to read, while a report by the Inspector of Prisons who visited Montgomery Gaol in September 1839, suggests that of the remaining seventeen Chartist prisoners from Llanidloes remanded in custody before their trial in July, thirteen were able to 'read' or 'read well', with only two of the remaining four being reported as 'not read'. Important to note, in his commentary to the report, the Inspector, Bissett Hawkins, added that, 'not all of the number could read English, as far as I was able to ascertain'.<sup>27</sup> On this point, the Reverend Pugh was of the opinion that any new system of education should be in the 'English tongue' rather than the 'vernacular', believing that English was much more 'commonly spoken and still more generally understood' in urban towns like Llanidloes than was believed<sup>28</sup> – an argument seemingly belied by the number of scholars attending Calvinist Methodist Sunday Schools, which were defiantly monoglot Welsh in outlook. In terms of an ability to write as well as read, only one transportee, Abraham Owen, is reported to have had this skill, though 'imperfectly'. But if the ability to sign one's name can be taken as a marker of literacy, the clemency petition of the convicted prisoners in Montgomery Gaol suggests that

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<sup>26</sup> *Education Enquiry, Abstract of the Answers and Returns made pursuant to an address of the House of Commons, dated 24 May 1833, Vol 1*, (London, House of Commons, 1835), p.1301.

<sup>27</sup> *Fifth Report of the Inspectors appointed...to visit the different prisons of Great Britain, III, Southern and Western District*, (London, House of Commons, 1840), pp.10-11.

<sup>28</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.564.

only seven of the thirty signatories had this skill – five weavers, one carder and a tailor.<sup>29</sup>

The want of an improved system of education locally was not the sole preserve of the Reverend Pugh. The *Hand-loom Weavers Report* carries a long statement from John Owen, described as, ‘the leading man among the weavers of Newtown’, concerning the consequences of the state of education in that town. Owen noted that one of the unforeseen consequences of the Factories Act had been to throw children into unemployment, where the inability of their parents to pay for any education resulted in their being left largely to their own devices and subject to, ‘temptation and vice’, which was ‘both injurious to themselves and to society in general’. The only thing that served to mitigate this harm was that ‘God-like institution, the Sunday-school’, of which there were six in Newtown containing some two thousand scholars. However, he recognised that the value of these institutions had their limits. Only reading of a religious nature was taught, writing and arithmetic being largely neglected due to their ‘secular’ nature. As a consequence, there were no alternative employments being opened up to children other than, ‘the manufacturing business’, where new entrants, ‘overstock the trade with hands’, thus leading to the conclusion that ‘a want of a school in this town where the rising poor may receive a liberal education is decidedly against the interests of the hand-loom weaver’.<sup>30</sup>

The predominance of Calvinistic Methodists Sunday Schools, and the sheer number of pupils (of all ages) attending non-conformist schools revealed by Table 1.5 and Owen’s testimony, begs a question about the denominational affiliation of

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<sup>29</sup> See the chapter on ‘Literacies’ in Barry Reay, *Microhistories*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp 213-253; TNA, HO18/5/28.

<sup>30</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.559.

the local population, and in particular the percentage of it that worked in the local wool trade. A recent piece of work by Frances Richardson has looked at a sample of Welsh non-conformist baptismal registers for the period 1813-1820 and compared the picture they present of non-conformist fathers' occupations with more commonly used Anglican baptismal sources.<sup>31</sup> Two of the chosen sample areas were the Hundreds of Newtown and Llanidloes – the latter comprising not only Llanidloes parish but the villages of the surrounding rural hinterland. Like for like comparison with the data from Table 1.3 is therefore not possible, but the findings from the study is useful for understanding the relationship between various trades and their affiliation with non-conformity.

**Table 1.6: Comparison of Anglican to Non-Conformist Occupations 1813-1820.**<sup>32</sup>

Profession	Llanidloes		Newtown		Llanidloes	
	Anglican %	NC %	Anglican %	NC %	CM %	Baptist %
Farmers & Farm Labourers	30	21	21	25	24	10
Wool Trade	20	41	15	41	43.5	23
General Labourers	24	13	38	12	9	18
Note: % proportion of total baptisms where occupations stated: Anglican: NC = 89%:11%						

The data for the Llanidloes Hundred was drawn from seventeen baptismal registers, containing some 299 records that listed the fathers' occupation. The majority of records related to Calvinistic Methodist baptisms. In terms of the occupations revealed by these registers, Richardson's work breaks these down as percentages of Anglican to non-conformist fathers against various trades in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, not all of which are relevant to our study.

<sup>31</sup> Frances Richardson, 'Missing from Parish Records: Anglican and non-conformist occupational differences and the economy of Wales c.1817', *Continuity and Change* (2002), 37. pp.165-197.

<sup>32</sup> Richardson, distilled from Table 3 and Table 5, pp.178-180; p.184.



Table 1.6 attempts to arrange these findings in relation to the highlighted occupations used in Table 1.3.

The conclusion reached by Richardson in regard to the wool trade in both the Llanidloes and Newtown Hundreds is that textile workers accounted for 41% of non-conformist baptisms, compared to 15% of Anglican baptisms in Newtown and 20% in Llanidloes. Similarly, denominational differences were noted between Calvinistic Methodists and Baptists in Llanidloes, with the former more likely to be weavers than the latter, and vice-versa in relation to general labourers. However, a caution is required in that these figures are percentages of total Anglican and non-conformist baptisms respectively, and not percentages of total baptisms. Non-conformist baptisms formed only 11% of total baptisms recorded across the seven Hundreds studied by Richardson, and though this percentage may have been a little higher in Llanidloes and Newtown where the flannel trade was centred, many more weavers were likely to have been Anglican rather than non-conformist at this time. However, Richardson's work does bear out the strong presence of non-conformity in Llanidloes, as well as the trend for workers in the local flannel trade to be affiliated with non-conformity. The evidence in a table of 'Dissenting Statistics' from 1834, which compared the number of Church to Dissenting 'hearers' in the parishes of Montgomeryshire – 250 against 2,850 for Llanidloes - is suggestive that this trend had strengthened between the time focussed upon by Richardson and the rise of Chartism in the town - a time during which Census returns indicate population growth in Llanidloes of 33% per decade.<sup>33</sup>

As Dorothy Thompson has noted, population growth was responsible for increasing competitive pressure on handicraft trades such as weaving that, though

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<sup>33</sup> 'Dissenting Statistics', *The Patriot*, 9 July 1834, p.5; for population growth see Table 2.2 below.

skilled, could be learnt, 'in a matter of months'.<sup>34</sup> In evidence to the *Hand-loom Weavers Report*, another Newtown weaver, Richard Evans, echoed the views of John Owen regarding the 'overstocking' of the trade, reporting that the consequence of the entry of women and children was 'to take the weavers work from him at under-price', and this at a time when there was already too little work to go around and weavers were constantly 'underselling each other'.<sup>35</sup> In terms of the wages that local weavers might earn, in Newtown the evidence of the official measurer at the market stated that,

*'a fair-working weaver earns about 12s. 6d. weekly; a middling weaver 9s. and women, children, or learners, about 6s., subject, however, to a deduction of 1s. a week for winding, and 6d. a week for candle. He says there are many weavers who earn 15s. a week, and many men could earn more than they do, but they do not make the best use of their time'*.<sup>36</sup>

However, a meeting of weavers held whilst Miles was taking evidence in the town, 'considered that their earnings did not on the annual average exceed 8s.6d. per week'.<sup>37</sup> In Llanidloes, the Reverend Pugh thought that, 'the best weavers, under the best masters, average about 9s. or 10s. per week', whilst 'the average wages of all taken together are about 7s'.<sup>38</sup> This figure of seven shillings is both that mentioned in the petition of the prisoners in Montgomery Gaol, and in line with the '£15 – £16' answer returned by George Meares in 1833, to a question circulated by the Commission on the Poor Laws, which asked what, 'an average Labourer, obtaining an average amount of Employment,' might expect to earn in a year.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Thompson *Chartists*, p.109.

<sup>35</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.558.

<sup>36</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.556.

<sup>37</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.556.

<sup>38</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.563.

<sup>39</sup> *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Enquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, p.654a.

Though certain weavers in a good week might earn their 'pound', the work was far from constant. Richard Evans stated that 'the chief work for the weaver is four months in the year', and other evidence from the Newtown section of Miles' report suggests that weavers spent much of their time, 'when waiting for work', in the cultivation of gardens and allotments that they clubbed together to rent, as well as paying a ground rent for setting potatoes in the fallow of neighbouring farmers' fields.<sup>40</sup> Other evidence of self-help and cooperative action available from the Newtown section of the report talks of the establishment of a cooperative society in 1832, "in order...to amass capital to employ ourselves". The subscription money was used to purchase groceries for sale to both members and other weavers, in an attempt to help them avoid the truck shops run by masters that were a feature of the trade in both Newtown and Llanidloes. By the time of Miles' visit however, this cooperative society had failed, primarily as a result of the dishonesty of the chosen storekeeper, who absconded to America with the surplus takings of the enterprise.<sup>41</sup>

Evidence of similar self-help arrangements in Llanidloes is lacking, possibly because such evidence would have detracted from the weight of the Reverend Pugh's damning condemnation of Llanidloes weavers as being, 'cradled in ignorance, and inured by habit and example to vice'.<sup>42</sup> George Meares, when answering a question from the Poor Law Commission concerning the ability of local labourers to 'lay by' spare earnings, opined that this was impossible, 'it is considered well if he can support himself and family'.<sup>43</sup> However, in both Newtown and Llanidloes, the weavers contributed from their scanty earnings to local benefit

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<sup>40</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.558

<sup>41</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.559

<sup>42</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.564

<sup>43</sup> *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Enquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, p.654b.

clubs. In Llanidloes there were four such 'friendly societies', to which most of the weavers subscribed, though Miles noted that the clubs were, 'not established or conducted on the latest and most approved principles and calculations', but rather, 'on the old plan of providing only for sickness and death'.<sup>44</sup>

In both towns, 'middle class attacks on the habits of working people' made much of the improvidence of the weaver.<sup>45</sup> One Newtown manufacturer felt that the hands did not 'work with the same spirit as formerly', and dismissed the complaint of one of his weavers who could not earn enough to support his family by suggesting he spent too little of his time at the loom and too much tending his 'potato ground'.<sup>46</sup> In Llanidloes, Reverend Pugh placed emphasis on the moral consequences arising from women finding occupation in local factories, suggesting that the neglect of their 'traditional role' led to their houses being 'dirty' and their families 'trained in ignorance', with the result that the weavers of the town were generally 'improvident' and 'given to drink'.<sup>47</sup> Both weavers and spinners in the flannel trade certainly had a reputation for hard drinking. One witness talked of a time when, after receiving wages on a Saturday night, the men would begin 'tippling', and continue 'till turned out of the public-houses', only to meet again the following day 'to renew their good-fellowship', and never thinking to return to work till their money or credit had ran out.<sup>48</sup> As Dorothy Thompson has noted, it is likely that the wages in question were paid at the public house, 'on pretext of getting change for bank notes', and that the publicans would have required the workers to buy a drink before giving change.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.564

<sup>45</sup> Thompson, *Chartism*, p.110.

<sup>46</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.556.

<sup>47</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.563.

<sup>48</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.560.

<sup>49</sup> Thompson, *Chartism*, p.113.

Though drunkenness was hardly a thing of the past, the evidence for Newtown suggests that the Temperance Movement was making great inroads. The weaver John Owen, quoted previously in regard to education in Newtown, claimed that in less than three years since its establishment, the local Temperance society had persuaded 1,100 members to take the 'pledge', among whom were ninety reformed drunkards, 'persons who were once a pest to the neighbourhood'. Making a link between the 'enormous sum of money' expended on drink and the beneficial effects upon trade that would accrue if it were expended instead on food and clothing, he concluded that 'sobriety, blended with intelligence, is the basis of national prosperity'.<sup>50</sup> It is worth stating that John Owen was a Chartist, who spoke at an open air mass meeting held at Newtown in October 1838, and who chaired a public meeting held in April 1839 on the occasion of a tour of mid-Wales by Henry Hetherington, designed to whip up both 'moral' and financial support for the People's Convention.<sup>51</sup>

In terms of Llanidloes, the *Hand-loom Weavers Report* provides no evidence in rebuttal of the Reverend Pugh's general condemnation of the drunken and profligate habits of the population, but in the matter of Temperance, other sources suggest that the reach of the movement was not confined to Newtown. A newspaper advertisement gives notice of a lecture in the town on 1 September 1836 by the Reverend Owen Clarke of the British and Foreign Temperance Society, while a report in the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* from 1838, though suggestive that 'tea-totalism falls off much in that town', was still able to report that 'habits of temperance appear more prevalent'.<sup>52</sup> And, as alluded to in the Introduction, even

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<sup>50</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.560

<sup>51</sup> *Shrewsbury Chronicle* 'Great Political Meeting at Newtown' 12 October 1838, p.3; Ronald Morris, 'Thomas Powell Chartist', *The Montgomeryshire Collections*, Vol 80 (1992), p.108.

<sup>52</sup> *North Wales Chronicle* 30 August, 1836, p.2.; 'Llanidloes' *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 2 March, 1838, p.4.

in riot, local Chartists could demonstrate remarkable sobriety. Newspaper reports may not have scrupled at accusing them of ransacking the cellar of the Trewythen Arms Hotel and of 'carrying the wine into the streets,' where they 'stove in the ends of the ale barrels'. But in point of fact, the testimony of Thomas Edmund Marsh - a man possessing no sympathy for the Chartists and who played the key role in the action taken by magistrates that led to the riot - makes it clear that in spite of much damage inflicted to door panels and windows at the Trewythen, such that there were only 'three pains left in the house', and 'robbery (chiefly by women I am told) committed', there was 'no ale or spirits taken'.<sup>53</sup>

But it was not just drunkenness or the stain of their poverty that marked out the local weaving population for middle class censure. In a section of his evidence subtitled, 'Insubordination of the population', the Reverend Pugh echoed what he claimed to be, 'the opinions and sentiments of the influential and better thinking part of the inhabitants', in describing the 'predominant habits of the people' as, 'defiance of all authority, dishonesty, and nightly depredations, fighting, drunkenness and profligacy'. And to illustrate his point he stated that, 'between poverty on one hand, and want of education on the other, the condition of Llanidloes presents a picture darker by many shades than any town of its size in the principality, except Merthyr Tidvil.'<sup>54</sup>

Though Merthyr and the iron and coal industries of the South Wales Valleys were a hot-bed of Chartism, from which germinated perhaps the most overtly 'physical force' challenge to the established order, the Newport Rebellion, a comparison of the social conditions of Llanidloes and that 'crucible' of Welsh industrialisation is

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<sup>53</sup> 'Ferocious Proceedings & Robbery by the Montgomeryshire Chartists', *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 2 May 1839, p.3; TNA, HO40/47, *Home Office: Disturbances Correspondence*, T.E. Marsh to Lord Clive, 2 May 1839, Piece 706.

<sup>54</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.563.

beyond the scope of the present study. Llanidloes was not immune to industrial unrest or unschooled in the employment of threatening language and symbolic criminal damage, but the employment of such tactics appear much more restrained than the likes of the Scotch Cattle movement or insurrectional tendencies of Merthyr, to which the Reverend Pugh seems to be alluding.<sup>55</sup>

*The Hand-loom Weavers Report* mentions a strike in 'October 1830' that was supported by manufacturers and weavers in Newtown – who were interested in seeing the masters of Llanidloes pay at a similar going rate to their own in order to prevent them from being able to undercut the cost of their own flannel.<sup>56</sup> The strike lasted five weeks, when the subscription money being on the point of running out, the strikers resorted to more direct action. Details on this strike and the accompanying unrest, which actually occurred two years later than the misdating of it in the *Hand-loom Weavers Report*, is available from the correspondence of George Meares and the Lord Lieutenant of the county with the Home Secretary. A letter sent in October 1832 reported that a crowd of some two to three hundred men, women and children had collected, 'in the early part of the night and conducted themselves very riotously by throwing stones, breaking the windows and otherwise damaging the property of several of the inhabitants'.<sup>57</sup>

The strike was in consequence of the weavers and spinners of the town, 'considering that their masters did not give them such wages as the demand and price of flannel at this time entitled them to'. Though the weavers had promised Meares that they would behave peaceable and quietly during the strike, 'and in a very great measure did so', other trades in the town, 'only partially employed',

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<sup>55</sup> For Scotch Cattle, see David Jones, 'Scotch Cattle and Chartism', in T. Herbert, T. and G.E. Jones, (eds) *People and Protest: Wales 1815–1880*, (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1988), pp.139–64.

<sup>56</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.564.

<sup>57</sup> TNA, HO 52/21 *Home Office: Counties Correspondence*, Piece 60, Letter of George Mears to Viscount Melbourne, 27 October 1832.

together with 'a great number of boys ten, twelve & fourteen years of age', had been the principal cause of the disturbance, which resulted in Meares swearing in forty special constables to help prevent a repeat of the disorder.<sup>58</sup> In the wake of the rioting, two threatening placards had been put up in the market place calling in bloodthirsty terms for further disorder and threatening the burning of looms in the streets of the town, 'if we were sent to Landeman's Land for that'.<sup>59</sup> The riot had clearly acted as a wakeup call to the manufacturers, for in his letter to the Home Secretary, Meares was able to report that, 'as nearly all the Masters have come to terms with their workmen, they will again go on with their work the beginning of the week.'<sup>60</sup>

In the preface to the second edition of his *History of the Industrial Revolution in North Wales*, A.H. Dodd mentions an additional placard being transmitted to the Home Secretary at this time, ending with a similarly antagonistic flourish of, 'Bread or Blood my boys'.<sup>61</sup> In fact, this placard belongs to a separate incident that occurred in January 1831, at a time when Montgomeryshire was much disturbed by the initial Reform Bill crisis. Speaking in the first person plural, the placard claimed sympathy with the working men of Llanidloes in their 'distresses', and particularly when the 'cheatish tricks' of the local manufacturers had 'reduced you to your former wages'. As a consequence, the paying of a 'conjugal visit' was promised, and to emphasise the point, 'the edges of the paper were covered with blood'.<sup>62</sup> In response to this threat to the peace, Meares mustered in 220 special constables for three months, principally local 'weavers, spinners and others belonging to the Flannel trade', who were to be remunerated for their trouble. At

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<sup>58</sup> TNA HO 52/21, Piece 60.

<sup>59</sup> TNA HO 52/21, Piece 65, Enclosure, Lord Clive to Viscount Melbourne, 29 October 1832.

<sup>60</sup> TNA HO 52/21, Piece 60.

<sup>61</sup> A.H. Dodd, *The Industrial Revolution in North Wales*, (Wrexham, Bridge Books Reprint, 1990) p.xiv.

<sup>62</sup> TNA HO52/16 Piece 283 and Enclosure 286, George Mears to Lord Clive, 9 January 1831.



the same time he arranged to meet with the manufacturers of the town, 'to propose that they shall pay the Wages they proposed to pay their weavers about Six Months ago, with which all parties were well satisfied', but which had been reduced first by two manufacturers, and then by all the others, 'as they said if they did not they could not compete with the others in the Market'.<sup>63</sup>

Such market-induced fluctuations in wages and accompanying intimidatory responses were on display again in December 1835, when a placard appeared on the Town Hall during a night when the hayrick of one local manufacturer was set on fire, and the windows of a second manufacturer broken. Signed by a supposed manufacturer calling himself a 'Peace Maker and Full Payer', the placard was addressed to 'the Masters that do not pay the price according to the Agreement', many of whom were subsequently named in the body of the text, which was basically a warning that, 'the workmen have an intention of turning out as soon as they can prepare things'.<sup>64</sup>

Though intimidatory in nature, the above actions also demonstrate a restraint similar to that observable in the Llanidloes riot, which though a violent event, did not in the end go beyond the release of the local Chartist leaders arrested by the London Police. It is perhaps worthy of note that in addition to those of the Trewythen, the only other windows broken in Llanidloes on that day of riot belonged to the man blamed with inciting it, Thomas Edmund Marsh, and the local vicar, the Reverend Evan Pugh.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> TNA, HO52/16, Piece 285, Edward Lewis, Magistrate's Clerk, printed proclamation, 10 January 1831; Piece 283, Mears to Lord Clive.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, HO64/5/112 *Home Office: Criminal (Rewards and Pardons) Correspondence*, Piece 298, 1 December 1835.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, HO40/46, *Home Office Disturbances Correspondence*: T.E. Marsh to Lord Clive, 2 May 1839.

This chapter has provided insight into the social and economic condition of Llanidloes at the time of the Chartist riot. In Chapter Two, we will investigate the impact of the New Poor Law in strengthening local support for the Chartist agenda.

## Chapter Two: The New Poor Law in Llanidloes.

The importance of the Poor Law Amendment Act (PLAA) to the growth of support for Chartism has already been alluded to in the Introduction. For David Jones, the anti-poor law campaign provided, 'much of the logic and urgency' that were carried over into Chartism, and he noted that, 'in mid-Wales much of the popular anger associated with Chartism sprang from the anti-Poor Law campaign'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Malcolm Chase states that the centralising nature of Poor Law Unions and the 'abolition of communal responsibility for the relief of the poor' they engendered, when combined with the 'punitive loss of freedom' threatened by the workhouse test, 'was massively resented'.<sup>2</sup> A number of historians, such as Andy Croll, Megan Evans and Peter Jones, and Keith Snell, make a case for viewing Wales as a separate region in regard to the implementation of, or resistance to, the New Poor Law, both in terms of the continuation of out-relief to able bodied paupers and prevarication over the establishment of workhouses.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Dorothy Thompson has noted that resistance to the Act initially provided common ground at the outset of the Chartist movement between the interests of radical reformers and the middle classes, who particularly resented its centralising tendencies.<sup>4</sup>

Local evidence of more-or-less passive resistance is certainly observable in the correspondence of the old poor law officials with the new central Poor Law Board as they struggled to come to terms with the implications of the Act, and similarly in the reports of William Day, the Assistant Commissioner with responsibility for

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<sup>1</sup> David Jones, *Chartism and Chartists*, (London, Penguin, 1975), p.155; p.154.

<sup>2</sup> Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New history* (Manchester University Press, 2007), p.15.

<sup>3</sup> Andy Croll, 'Reconciled gradually to the system of indoor relief: the poor law in Wales during the 'crusade against out-relief', c.1870–1890', *Family & Community History*, Vol.20, (2017), p.122; Megan Evans and Peter Jones, 'A Stubborn, Intractable Body: Resistance to the Workhouse in Wales, 1834–1877', *Family & Community History*, Vol.17, (2014), p.105; Keith Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.225.

<sup>4</sup> Dorothy Thompson, *The Early Chartists*, (London, Macmillan, 1971), p.11.

implementing and overseeing the running of the new system across the greater part of Wales. The boundaries of the new Poor Law Union, joining Llanidloes and its surrounding parishes with its local manufacturing rival, Newtown, were not finalised until early in 1837 and in the meanwhile the administration of relief went on substantially as before.

Llanidloes had the notoriety of being named in the Report of the Poor Law Commission as guilty of paying out nearly half the local poor rate on the rents of pauper cottages.<sup>5</sup> In a letter of 31 December 1834, the Vestry Clerk, Edward Lewis, notified the Poor Law Board that fully £978,10s,4d had been expended for that purpose in the past year.<sup>6</sup> Though he stated that notices had been served on landlords that leases would not be renewed - a later resolution of the Vestry that 'the Parish Officers shall not in future rent any houses for Paupers' being likewise forwarded - eighteen months later the same gentleman reported an expense of £589 on rents and speculated on a continuance of the practice in the coming year.<sup>7</sup> The renting of cottages for paupers, described by the Poor Law Board as, 'a pernicious tendency and moreover of doubtful legality' was similarly practiced in the neighbouring parish of Llangurig.<sup>8</sup> As late as April 1837, this parish was reporting a debt of £200 falling due on '30-40 houses which have been taken for the paupers some years back...and have not been given up in proper time'.<sup>9</sup>

Thanks to the survival of a minute of a Vestry meeting held in Llanidloes on 3 and 4 May 1837, 'for the purpose of settling what allowances on Account of Rents and Weekly Pay will be allowed to the paupers of the said Parish of Llanidloes for the

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<sup>5</sup> *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practice of the Poor Laws* (London, House of Commons, 1834), p.9.

<sup>6</sup> The National Archives (TNA), MH12/16597, Newtown & Llanidloes 624, 1833-1842.

<sup>7</sup> TNA, MH12/16597, letter of 21 April 1836.

<sup>8</sup> TNA, MH12/16597, letters of 3 and 5 February 1835, with annotation by the Poor Law Board.

<sup>9</sup> TNA, MH12/16597, letter of 13 April 1837

ensuing year', we have a full list of the persons due to be in receipt of rental and out-relief payments in the four divisions of the parish.<sup>10</sup> Table 2.1, distilled from analysis of the names, professions, dependents and sums granted in relief, gives an insight into the make-up of Llanidloes pauperism at a time shortly before the growth of Chartism in the town.

**Table 2.1: Budgeted Poor Law Expenditure for 1837-1838.**

Category of Pauper	Named Recipients	Dependent family	Rents Paid £,s,d.	Weekly Pay £,s,d.	Average Weekly Pay	Rent %	WP %
Male Widows	40	55	47,5,0.	105,6,0.	1s,1d.	11%	19%
Female Widows	3	4	1,6,0.	9,2,0.	1s,2d.	0.20%	1%
Single Women	32	32	25,1,3.	89,1,0.	1s,8d.	6%	16%
Labourers	40	198	92,7,0.	55,5,0.	6d.	21%	10%
Weavers	47	243	111,18,0.	86,9,0.	8.5d.	25%	15%
Spinners	17	85	42,3,0.	32,10,0.	9d.	9%	6%
Other Wool Trade	6	35	16,15,0.	12,7,0.	9d.	4%	2%
Other Trades (15)	27	115	56,18,0.	64,7,0.	11d.	13%	11%
No Profession	40	111	50,12,0.	111,2,0.	1s,1d	11%	20%
<b>Totals =</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>878</b>	<b>443,05,3.</b>	<b>565,09,0.</b>			
			<b>£1009,14s,3d.</b>				

The Vestry list gives the annual rental payment allowed for each recipient and the 'weekly pay' that they were due to receive as out-relief. These sums have been added together to arrive at the total payable to each category of recipient and the total payable for the year under each head of expenditure. The average weekly pay has then been worked out per category of recipient, as well as the percentage of rent and weekly pay received by each grouping on the list. The various trades of those in receipt of relief are stated for 137 of the 252 persons on the list. Widows

<sup>10</sup> TNA, MH12/16597, *A Copy taken out of the Vestry Book*, forwarded by Edward Lewis, Vestry Clerk on 12 May 1837.

are also clearly identified on the list, whilst the category of 'single women' has been collated from names of women who have only one dependent, presumed to be an illegitimate child. The final category of 'no profession' is a catch-all where insufficient information is available to attribute a recipient to any other category. Perhaps surprisingly, only seven of the named individuals are reported as having a disability – four suffering from blindness and three denoted as 'cripples' or having 'one child a cripple'. In four of these seven cases, the disability belonged to someone with a designated 'trade' in the list. Twenty-three of the people named are identified as belonging to another parish, there being eleven from neighbouring Newtown, six from parishes immediately neighbouring Llanidloes, two from other parts of mid-Wales and four from further afield. Of the 252 names, sixteen are listed as having 'no allowance granted in future', or in one instance, 'no wages'. There is no discernible pattern behind the refusal to grant relief to these sixteen individuals, who cross the various categories of relief recipient. They have been included when calculating the average weekly pay and the percentages shown in the table.

The total forecast expenditure on rents in the year, at £443, is lower than the £589 reported by Edward Lewis to the Poor Law Board in April 1836. This is suggestive of a year-on-year diminution occurring, though as the figures in the Vestry list are a budget forecast rather than a settled account there is the potential that the overseers might have had to step in and support more paupers with rents over the course of the year. Similarly, in regard to 'weekly pay', there were likely to be additional calls for support arising from illness or other precarious employment circumstances. Table 2.2, which is compiled from entries concerning Llanidloes in the various reports of the Poor Law Board for the years ending March 1835 to March 1837, would seem to suggest that the actual amount paid out in the year in

rents and weekly pay combined, was likely to have been closer to the £1,870 total of the preceding year.

**Table 2.2: Llanidloes Poor Law Rates and Payments distilled from Poor Law Returns.**<sup>11</sup>

	Levied	Relief given	Removals	County rate	Other	Total
<b>March 1835</b>	£2,731,7s	£2,227,4s	£ 35,9s	£156,18s	£183,3s	£2,602,14s
<b>March 1836</b>	£2,286,2s	£1,856,8s	£42,17s	£125,11s	£255,14s	2,280,10s
<b>March 1837</b>	£2,157,0s	£1,870.0s	£35,0s	£75,0s	£311,0s	£2,291,0s
<b>Average =</b>	£2,391,10s	£1,984,10s	£37,16s	£119,2s	£250,0s	£2,391,8s

However, it is worth noting that the reporting of individual figures for expenditure on the poor in the Llanidloes parish dry up from the Fourth Annual report of the Poor Law Board onwards. The figures for relief up to 25 March 1838 are lumped together for the whole of the seventeen parishes in the new Newtown and Llanidloes Union. The overall figure for the Union in that year shows a decrease of 25% on the average of the three preceding years.<sup>12</sup> Calculating a decrease of 25% on the average of the figures for 'relief given' in Llanidloes in Table 2.2 would suggest a sum of rent and weekly pay of approximately £1,488 for the year to 25 March 1838 covered by the Vestry list. Llanidloes may have bucked this trend - it was certainly the parish in the Union with the highest total expenditure on the poor based upon the averages recorded in the Third Annual Report, though the three smaller, more rural parishes in the Union surrounding Llanidloes had a higher rate of expenditure per head of population. However, it is worth noting that this potential decrease of 25% reported in the Fourth Annual report is not the whole

<sup>11</sup> *Appendix to the Second Annual Report of the Commissioners under the Poor Law Amendment Act*, (London, House of Commons, 1837), pp.500-551; *Appendix to the Third Annual Report of the Commissioners under the Poor Law Amendment Act*, (London, House of Commons, London, 1838), p.254.

<sup>12</sup> *Fourth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales*, (London, House of Commons, 1839), p.50.

story, for even under the Old Poor Law, the relief paid to paupers per head of population had been decreasing over a period of thirty years. In his answers to the circular of the Poor Law Commissioners previously noticed in Chapter One, the magistrate George Meares had reported on population growth in the town since the first census in 1801, together with the expenditure on poor relief in each census year in relation to total expenditure and expenditure per head. These figures, detailed in Table 2.3, show that, from a highpoint during the Napoleonic Wars, though the figure for total expenditure had remained more or less constant, population growth in the town had cut expenditure per head markedly over the course of forty years.

**Table 2.3: Population Growth & Expenditure on Poor Relief in Llanidloes 1801-1841.** <sup>13</sup>

	1801	1811	1821	1831	1841
Population	2282	2386	3145	4189	4261
% population growth		4.50%	32%	33%	2%
Expenditure on the Poor	£1,118	£2,264	£2,213	£2,401	(£1,800)
Expense per head	9s,9d.	18s,11d.	14s,1d.	11s,5d.	(8s,7d.)
% change per head		100%	-26%	-18%	-25%

For the purposes of this study, the most notable categories of recipients of relief revealed by Table 2.1 are the weavers, spinners and other wool related trades that we know from Chapter One to be those most associated with the Chartist movement in Llanidloes. Weavers are both the most represented trade on the list, with more recipients (47) than any other represented category, they also receive the highest share of relief (25%) in the form of rental payments. When added to

<sup>13</sup> Compiled from, *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Enquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, (London, House of Commons, London, 1834), p.654a. The figures in brackets are an extrapolation based upon the percentage decrease in expenditure noted in the *Fourth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, p.50.



the spinners, fullers and slubbers, representatives of the flannel trade in the town are found to be in receipt of fully 38% of the rental payments and 23% of the weekly pay - or 30% of the whole relief forecast by the May Vestry meeting. This is a significant proportion of poor relief funds going to a group of more or less able-bodied workers who, though by the 1841 Census represent 43% of the economically active inhabitants of the town, form only 15% of the total population. Such statistics qualify the answer returned by George Meares to the Poor Law Commissioners in response to questions concerning the payment of subsidies from the Poor Rates to able bodied paupers in support of wages. Though he admitted that there were, 'many persons employed who receive relief from the parish', he stated that this was not to make up fair wages, 'but because their families are numerous'. Their earnings he believed, 'though fair in amount', were simply 'not equal to the support of them all'.<sup>14</sup>

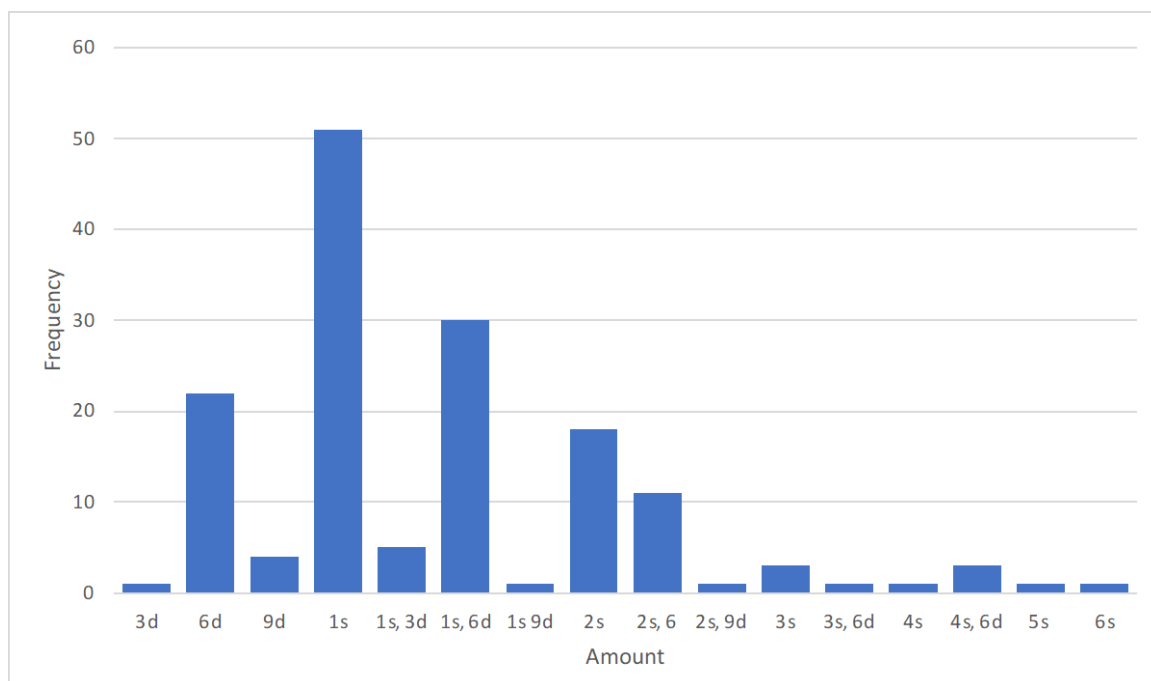
As we have seen, the majority of the support given to members of the flannel trade was targeted at rents. The actual figures for 'weekly pay' given to this group averaged only 9d, though, as Figure 2.1 shows, there was a wide variation in the amounts paid, with most being clustered around the 1s–1s,6d mark. It is not easy to discern any particular system behind the determination of who received what, or why. Thus two weavers, Thomas Davies and John Thickers, having nine and six dependents respectively and receiving £3 in rent in the year, have a differential in weekly pay of 5s against 1s,6d. Similarly, Susan Cleaton, a single woman with only one dependent, was to receive 2s in weekly pay in addition to £1,6s rent, while Elizabeth Jones was expected to make do with no rental support and just 6d a week. The lack of additional supporting material makes it difficult to explain how such decisions were arrived at, but it possibly reflects judgements being made on

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<sup>14</sup> *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners*, p.654b.

who were felt to be more or less deserving of support, as studies of Vestry minutes in other parts of the country have suggested.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 2.1: Weekly Pay - Frequency of amounts to be paid during 1837-1838**



In Chapter One, we saw that the wages available to weavers in Llanidloes averaged 7s per week. The addition of an average 9d of poor relief does not sound a lot in terms of topping up the economy of makeshifts required to sustain life and limb for a potentially large family. Spinners, though ostensibly less ‘skilled’ than weavers, had the advantage of their work being mechanised, which enabled them to earn more as a consequence - the Reverend Pugh suggests a figure of 12s a week in his evidence to the *Hand-loom Weavers Report*.<sup>16</sup> But could a family, to borrow a question from the Poor Law Commissioners posed in the circular sent to George Meares, ‘subsist on these earnings? and if so, on what food?’ Meares though not, and went on to describe the local diet as principally

<sup>15</sup> Stephen King & Alana Tompkins, ‘Introduction’, in Alana Tompkins and Stephen King, (eds.) *The Poor In England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, (Manchester University Press, 2003), pp.15-16.

<sup>16</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers, Reports from Assistant Hand-loom Weavers’ Commissioners, Part V. Report by W.A. Miles*, (London, House of Commons, 1840) p.563.

consisting 'of potatoes, oatmeal, salted and fresh herrings,' while, 'some of the most industrious, fully employed, occasionally have a little bacon, seldom if ever butcher's meat'.<sup>17</sup> Helpfully, the *Handloom Weavers Report* compiles a table of the local price of various foodstuffs during the period 1836–1838, reproduced here as Table 2.4.

**Table 2.4 Statement of the Retail Prices of Various Articles of Provisions and Household Stores in the year 1836, 1837, 1838.**<sup>18</sup>

Of Ordinary Qualities	1836 <i>s,d.</i>	1837 <i>s,d.</i>	1838 <i>s,d.</i>
Oatmeal, per peck.	2,10.	3,4.	4,8.
Barley, ditto.	2,0.	2,6.	3,9.
Potatoes, 240lb. to the sack before washed.	6,0.	7,0.	12,0.
Beef, good boiling, per lb.	0,5.	0,5.	0,6.
Beef, course pieces, ditto.	0,3 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> .	0,3 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> .	0,4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> .
Pork, per lb.	0, 4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> .	0,4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> .	0,5.
Bacon, per lb.	0,7.	0,8.	0,10.
Cheese, per lb.	0,4.	0,5.	0,6.
Butter, per lb.	0,11.	0,11.	0,11.
Candles, per lb.	0,6.	0,7.	0,8.
Soap, per lb.	0,5.	0,5.	0,5.
Coals, per cwt.	1,6.	1,8.	1,10.
Tea, per lb.	6,0.	5,0.	5,0.
Sugar, per lb.	0,6 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> .	0,7.	0,7.

This Table is not easy to interpret, as it is difficult to know what amount of provisions, or their mix, were required to provide a sustainable calorific intake of food on a weekly basis. Perhaps of more immediate note is the fact that Table 2.4

<sup>17</sup> *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners*, p.654b.

<sup>18</sup> *Hand-loom Weavers*, p.565.

reveals significant inflationary trends on certain types of provisions, primarily those identified by George Meares, at a time when wages were, at best, stagnant and, as we have seen, available poor relief was diminishing.

The evidence drawn from the Vestry list of Llanidloes paupers certainly suggests a correlation between poverty and workers in the flannel trade, just as the list of prisoners locked up in Montgomery Gaol (Table 1.1) demonstrates a clear link between workers in that trade and Chartism in Llanidloes. However, a comparison of the names on the two lists fails to identify any direct connection. Ten names appear on both lists, but this is primarily due to the commonality of certain names in Llanidloes at this period. 'John Jones', for instance, appears eight times on the Vestry list, but not one of these mentions appears to be the John Jones, weaver, with a wife and three children, incarcerated in Montgomery Gaol for 6mths. The only potential match across the two lists is a weaver called John Evans, aged 35 with five children, but this again is a common name, there being three John Evans on the gaol list and two on the Vestry list. Not all known Chartists in Llanidloes were jailed, some had charges dropped whilst others successfully slipped the net cast by the yeomanry in the immediate aftermath of the riot. A case could be made for several of these known Chartists on the Vestry list, and it is of course entirely possible that kin relations of known Chartists were in receipt of aid - Ann Williams, for instance, is reported as having four brothers and sisters on the parish - but the available evidence is too thin to draw any firm conclusions.

The consequence of eleven families, comprising over fifty dependents, being thrown onto the support of the parish by the imprisonment of the Llanidloes Chartists is perhaps more indicative of the state of precariousness of workers in

the local flannel trade.<sup>19</sup> This fact is further emphasised by a second clemency petition of the prisoners in Montgomery Gaol, sent to Lord Normanby in November 1839 on his taking over from Lord John Russell as Home Secretary. Putting aside the political arguments that had characterised their first petition, they made their new case on the strength of, 'many of us have large families now in a most deplorable condition, even on the very brink of starvation'.<sup>20</sup> A final insight on this point comes from the report of the Inspector of Prisons mentioned in Chapter One, where he notes some of the prisoners appealing to the prison's surgeon in the following terms, "we have families, our strength is failing, and if we go on at the tread-wheel with our present diet, we shall not be able to maintain them when we get out".<sup>21</sup>

Even though the sums allotted for rental payments at the May Vestry were substantially reduced from the figure expended on rents in 1834, the continuance of the practice was certainly against the policy of the Poor Law Board. The latter body had provided a loophole in regard to the continued renting of properties 'for infirm and aged' paupers, 'for whom it may continue for a time',<sup>22</sup> but as we have seen, the practice in Llanidloes for the year 1837 went well beyond such limited scope, not to mention the clear continuation of monetary out-relief to able-bodied paupers revealed by the return.

For Assistant Commissioner William Day, such bad local practice was clearly part and parcel of, 'Llanidloes and its neighbourhood' being, 'the very hot bed of Poor Law corruption'.<sup>23</sup> His opinion may have been influenced by the notoriety of rental

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<sup>19</sup> See Table 1.1.

<sup>20</sup> TNA, HO18/5/28 Second Petition of the prisoners in Montgomery Gaol, forwarded 14 November 1839

<sup>21</sup> *Fifth Report of the Inspectors appointed...to visit the different prisons of Great Britain, III, Southern and Western District*, (London, House of Commons, 1840), p.10.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, MH12/16597, draft response to a letter dated 5 February 1835.

<sup>23</sup> TNA, MH32/14, William Day, Correspondence and papers related to the Welsh District 1835-1837, letter of W. Day to the Poor Law Board, 11 September 1836.

payments being handed over to paupers while their landlords' agents were in the room;<sup>24</sup> but it also had much to do with his dislike of the Vestry Clerk, Edward Lewis, whom he described as a 'sort of actor of all work – combining in his portly person the character of Town Clerk – Magistrates' Clerk and publican!!!'. Lewis apparently retained the accounts of local overseers after their presentation for scrutiny by the Magistrates, 'till they had dined at his house and spent 7s each', and it was no use complaining, as the Magistrates, 'were completely the tools of this man'.<sup>25</sup> It probably had not helped Day's opinion of Lewis, nor of Llanidloes, that his brief sojourn in the town had been objected to by the local populace. According to the report delivered by Henry Hetherington to the National Convention of the Labouring Classes, following his lecture tour of the area in April 1839, finding that Day would not leave despite various threats, 'the next night his gig was put over the bridge and smashed to pieces'.<sup>26</sup> This story is corroborated by Edward Hamer, who adds that despite the offering of a 'large reward for information that would lead to a conviction of the offenders...they were never discovered.'<sup>27</sup>

It was Day's recommendation to the Poor Law Board that saw Llanidloes and Newtown brought together in a single Union, in which the ability of men like Lewis to influence proceedings would be tempered. The initial meeting of the new Union was held on 14 February 1837. A Chair was appointed and, bucking a trend observable elsewhere in Wales (it took the neighbouring Machynlleth Union twenty years to get round to building theirs)<sup>28</sup> - a resolution was passed to build a workhouse for 350 paupers at Caersws, a mid-point between the two towns. Not

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<sup>24</sup> Edward Hamer, *A Brief Account of the Chartist Outbreak at Llanidloes in the Year 1839*, (Llanidloes, John Pryce, 1867), p.7.

<sup>25</sup> TNA MH32/14, William Day, letter of 11 September 1836.

<sup>26</sup> 'Mr Hetherington's Mission', *The Sun*, 26 April 1839, p.2.

<sup>27</sup> Hamer, *Brief Account*, p.8.

<sup>28</sup> Megan Evans and others, 'A Stubborn, Intractable Body', p.105.

all were happy with the choice of Caersws, certain Newtown manufacturers had objected that 'their paupers' would be removed to 'where they could not readily obtain their services when they wanted them', but in the end Day was able to obtain enough votes to carry the proposal.<sup>29</sup>

He was probably helped by the absence of any elected Guardians from Llanidloes. By allocation, there should have been three, but it appears that of the initial six individuals nominated, three had promptly withdrawn. Then, 'previous to the day of return, first one, then the other two nominees also resigned'.<sup>30</sup> Their reasons for doing so are not given, but might be guessed at from the correspondence between parish overseers and the Poor Law Board. Thus Edward Rees of Llangurig, writing in April, after declaring his own parishes' support for the New Poor Law, states boldly that every other 'parish in the Union is against it'. The parish of Trefeglwys, bordering on that of Llanidloes, was 'cruelly against it' and on 6 April, 'the paupers and many of the farmers of the parish' armed with 'clubs and staves,' had kidnapped the newly appointed Relieving Officer for that division of the Union and marched him to the local Vestry, where he was forced to pay over money to the local overseer for distribution to the gathered paupers. What is more, 'it would have been the same at Llanidloes on Saturday last, had not T.E. Marsh and Mr Hamer of Delvarch interfered and argued with the paupers in a peaceable way'.<sup>31</sup> Shortly before this time, in March, a petition had been presented to Parliament from Llanidloes begging that the PLAA should not be extended to Wales.<sup>32</sup> Though the town was not without representation on the board of Guardians thereafter – there were three present at the Vestry meeting held in May 1837 – the role was

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<sup>29</sup> TNA MH32/14, W. Day, letter of 11 September 1836.

<sup>30</sup> TNA MH32/14, W. Day, letter of 14 February 1837.

<sup>31</sup> MH12/16597, letter of Edward Rees, 13 April 1837.

<sup>32</sup> *The Morning Post*, 15 March 1837, p3.

something of a thankless task. David Davies, 'one of the largest Flannel Manufacturers of the Town', deposed prior to the Llanidloes riot that he had been informed by some of his workers, who were members of the local Political Union, 'that he is a marked man', the reason being, 'this deponent was last year a Poor Law Guardian and, as he is informed, is styled by the Unionists a Bastille Tyrant'.<sup>33</sup>

The winter of 1837-1838 was clearly a difficult one that required more assistance than the operation of the New Poor Law was able to give. The *Shrewsbury Chronicle* reported in February that at Llanidloes, 'the poor have been supplied with soup by the benevolent aid of several ladies', while 'the gentlemen and tradesmen have supplied coal at the rate of 6d. per cwt. (the usual price is 1s.5d. per cwt.)'. Blankets and flannel to the value of £33 had also been distributed.<sup>34</sup> The pressure on the poor was worsened by a downturn in trade, for while the new flannel mart had performed promisingly in the preceding year, in 1838 and 1839 the same paper was reporting trade at the mart in such terms as 'rather low' and 'exceedingly flat'.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, support for the Charter was growing. According to Hamer, the 'disaffected labouring classes' of Llanidloes were initiated into the Charter by the return of a local carpenter, Richard Jerman, from Birmingham. Gathering people around him to discuss the contents of the 'inflammatory pamphlets' of the Chartist leadership, soon these invitations to 'discuss politics...came to be considered only of secondary importance to their daily labour'. As an example of the fervour whipped up by this 'promulgator of a new gospel of liberty', the sceptical Hamer cites a prayer purported to have been in frequent use at the time, which thanked

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<sup>33</sup> TNA, HO40/46, Home Office Disturbances Correspondence: T.E. Marsh to Lord Clive, 19 April 1839.

<sup>34</sup> *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 9 February 1838, p.3.

<sup>35</sup> *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 21 December 1838; 15 March 1839.



God for sending Jerman to enlighten the local population.<sup>36</sup> By September, *The Silurian* was reporting on the formation of a branch of the Birmingham Political Union in the town, consisting of 'more than a hundred members', while by February in the following year a 'correspondent' to the same paper could report that the latest meeting 'was thronged to suffocation'.<sup>37</sup> Hetherington, in his report to the National Convention, put the number enrolled at six hundred, a figure confirmed by the Mayor of Llanidloes in a letter of alarm sent to the Lord Lieutenant soon after Hetherington's visit.<sup>38</sup>

The first 'great political demonstration' in the area was held in Newtown in October 1838. Chaired by Richard Jerman, it drew an estimated audience of five thousand people, who were regaled by speeches from local Chartists and members of the Birmingham Political Union. Though the meeting passed off peaceably, the next demonstration, 'sacrilegiously' convened for Christmas Day, was deemed by local magistrates to be much more potentially dangerous, as the chosen venue for the meeting was adjacent to the building-site of the new workhouse at Caersws.<sup>39</sup> To protect the workhouse, three troops of yeomanry were called out in support of the civil power, which consisted of 150 special constables sworn in on the day before the meeting. The link between Chartism and antipathy to the New Poor Law was not lost on the magistrate who instigated these precautions. The Reverend John Davies was an ex-officio Guardian and the Chair of the Newtown and Llanidloes Union. Writing to the Poor Law Board, he explained that in the flannel manufacturing towns of Newtown and Llanidloes, 'the trade, as is usual at this season, is slack, so that there is always a more or less number out of

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<sup>36</sup> Hamer, *Brief Account*, p.9.

<sup>37</sup> *The Silurian*, 1 September 1838, p.1; 23 February 1839, p.3.

<sup>38</sup> *The Sun*, 26 April 1839, p.3; TNA HO 40/46, Disturbances Correspondence, letter of 16 April 1839.

<sup>39</sup> HO 40/40, letter of Magistrates to Lord Clive, 19 December 1838.

employment'. Add in 'the high price of provisions' and the fact that the local operatives were a 'dissipated and improvident body', spoilt 'by former parish allowances', and the result was a ready disposition, 'to listen to those who offer a way to better their condition'. Threats had been made 'by the lower orders that they would wait until the workhouse was built and then pull it down' and though these threats 'have hitherto been treated as idle', he did not doubt that, 'if excited by those men of mischief, O'Connor, Stephens and Oastler...it may be no sooner said than done'.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the special constables and yeomanry presence at Caersws, attempts were made by local manufacturers to pressure their workers against attendance at the meeting. In Llanidloes, the Mayor published a proclamation that warned of 'the dangerous consequences of attendance' which were 'too plainly proved by the serious results of similar Meetings lately held at TODMORDEN', where anti-poor law protests had led to riot and repressive measures on the part of the authorities.<sup>41</sup> Accounts vary as to the success of these precautions. Lord Clive estimated attendance at around two hundred, principally from Newtown. The Reverend Davies put it at six hundred while *The Silurian* spoke of 'several thousands'.<sup>42</sup> In the end it all passed off peaceably; a number of speeches were made, 'on the ballot, universal suffrage, the repeal of the Corn Laws and of the New Poor Law', of which according to John Davies, 'the three first topics...are not much dwelt upon by the lower orders - the New Poor Law interested them more'. It is interesting to note that William Day did not share the appreciation of the Chair of the local Union. In reporting on this same, 'social grievances meeting', to the Poor

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<sup>40</sup> MH12/16597, letter of 21 December 1838.

<sup>41</sup> HO 40/40, enclosed with letter of Lord Clive, 27 December 1838.

<sup>42</sup> HO 40/40, letter of 29 December 1839; 'Newtown Radical Demonstration', *The Silurian*, 5 January 1839, p.3.

Law Board, he stated, 'I believe it had nothing to do with the Poor Laws – tho' it will be said so. It was the Charter!'.<sup>43</sup>

Day's inability to identify opposition to the Poor Law in the 'social grievances' complained about by local Chartists is perhaps not altogether surprising given that contemporary press reporting of these events similarly fail to state the connection. In the long report of the Caersws meeting carried by *The Silurian*, no mention is made of the Poor Laws, the concentration being upon a speech by Charles Jones - the Welshpool Chartist chosen to represent the area at the National Convention - so abundant in classical references and hyperbole that it is no wonder if it was 'not much dwelt upon'. The notices calling the meetings at Newtown and Caersws are similarly lacking in direct reference to the Poor Law, unless appeals to 'all who wish to see poverty and misery banished from our land' can be so interpreted.<sup>44</sup> The article, 'from a correspondent', carried by *The Silurian* in February 1839, which gives a tantalising glimpse of the 'thronged to suffocation' meeting of the Llanidloes Political Union, only reports that the newly elected president 'gave an explanation of the principles of this institution'. Beyond dwelling 'minutely upon the ballot, universal suffrage and limited election', nothing is stated that gives a clue to motivations behind local support for the Chartist programme.<sup>45</sup> There is also a complete lack of direct testimony from local Chartists in the press coverage of the riot or the trial of Llanidloes rioters, who similarly fail to find voice in witness depositions relating to the events in Llanidloes before and during the riot. The majority of these testimonies were taken with the implicated Chartists in the room

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<sup>43</sup> TNA MH32/15, William Day, Correspondence and papers related to the Welsh District, 1838, 29 December 1838.

<sup>44</sup> 'Great Political Meeting at Newtown', *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 12 October, 1838, p.3

<sup>45</sup> 'Llanidloes Political Union', *The Silurian* 23 February 1839, p.3.

and invariably conclude with the prisoners declining to exercise their right to question the witness or offer justification for their actions.<sup>46</sup>

It is necessary therefore, to fall back on the indirect testimony of other witnesses, some of whom, such as the Reverend John Davies, doubtless biased in their viewpoint of what was going on. Testimony like that of Humphrey Gwalchmai, the Calvinistic Methodist preacher and journalist who wrote one of the first published accounts of the riot in his journal *Yr Athraw* in June 1839. No lover of the local Chartists, whom he described as ‘disrespectful breakers of the laws of heaven’, he still did not hesitate to identify the institution of the New Poor Law as the trigger for ‘dissatisfaction’ that led to the establishment of the political union at Llanidloes.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Edward Hamer, writing some twenty-seven years after the riot (but still in living memory), states that the New Poor Law caused, ‘the first shadow of a grievance’ to arise, one that provoked ‘lusty’ cries ‘against the new regulations with their supplementary red brick “palace” at Caersws’.<sup>48</sup> A ‘palace’ that, according to the report of ‘An Eyewitness at Llanidloes’ published by the *Shrewsbury News*, narrowly escaped being made the object of a nocturnal ‘attempt’ by local Chartists in the immediate aftermath of the riot.<sup>49</sup>

Though impossible to quantify, it seems safe to conclude that the implementation of the New Poor Law contributed to the growth of social grievances amongst a Llanidloes population that was already struggling to make economic ends meet. The PLAA brought with it a threat to remove the safety net of support that a significant proportion of the labouring poor of the town relied upon, whether to enable them to afford a roof over their head, or feed themselves and their

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<sup>46</sup> TNA, ASSI 65/2, Assizes: North and South Wales Circuit, Chester and North Wales Division: Criminal Depositions.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Y Chartists yn Llanidloes’, *Yr Athraw, Mehefin* (June) 1839, pp.136-142.

<sup>48</sup> Hamer, *Brief Account*, p.6.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Political Commotion in Wales’ (From the *Shrewsbury News*), *Northern Star*, May 11 1839, p.8.

expanding families in a period of rapid demographic growth. Though far from all workers in the flannel trade of the town were in receipt of relief, as a body the weavers and spinners of Llanidloes had skin in the game, and it seems logical to suppose that they carried their opposition to the PLAA through into support for the promise of a fairer distribution of wealth arising from the implementation of the six points of the People's Charter.

## Conclusion

In this study we set out to investigate the motivations that engendered mass support for Chartism in a peripheral mid-Wales market town in 1839. In particular, the aim was to test the hypothesis that local opposition to the New Poor Law regime, with its centralised bureaucracy and workhouse test, was a significant driver behind that local support.

The evidence presented in Chapter One suggests that the flannel industry in Llanidloes, in common with 'hand-loom weaving in all branches of textiles', was a 'depressed trade'.<sup>1</sup> One of underemployment, in which the pressure of new entrants, notably women and children, was driving wages down to subsistence levels and below, and in which the impoverished weavers were likely to be 'the first thrown out of work if their trade faced recession'.<sup>2</sup> This alone may have been sufficient to engender support for Chartism, for it was from such depressed trades that the movement drew some of its 'most committed and literate members'.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, there could not have been much hope of a state-sponsored solution to the economic fluctuations that bedevilled their trade being forthcoming under the present Parliamentary regime. One presumes that it came as no surprise to weavers like John Owen, to learn that the final report of the *Royal Commission on Hand-loom Weaving* could only recommend they 'flee from the trade, and...beware of leading children into it, as they would beware the commission of the most atrocious crime'.<sup>4</sup> Agitation for the Charter also coincided with an economic downturn that left the textile trades in a chronic state of distress and threatened to drive the workforce, 'over the edge into desperation'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (Aldershot, Wildwood House, 1986). p.107.

<sup>2</sup> Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A new history*, (Manchester University Press, 2007). P.20.

<sup>3</sup> David Jones, *Chartism and Chartists*, (London, Penguin, 1975), p.115.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Thompson, *Chartism*, p.112.

<sup>5</sup> F.C. Mather, *Public Order in the age of Chartism*, (Manchester University Press, 1959), p.5.

Yet, even in desperation, the resort to Temperance, non-conformist Sunday schools and other forms of self-education, as well as involvement in cooperative and mutual organisations - all recognised as 'important ideas found amongst Chartists' - were being applied locally to try and ward off the worst effects of industrialisation.<sup>6</sup> Institutions such as these were amongst those, 'by which working men became involved in the business of politics' and learnt the necessary skills of governance that were carried over into political unions and others mechanisms in support of Chartism.<sup>7</sup> Nor were local working men and women lacking experience, through industrial action, in the ways of applying 'physical force' in support of their demands.

But as Chapter Two has attempted to show, the implementation of the Poor Law Amendment Act, with its direct impact upon the amounts paid out in rents and out-relief - to working men with large families as well as to paupers per se – combined with the incipient threat of separation of families and incarceration for the crime of poverty in the workhouse building at Caersws, had the potential to quicken the urgency and the fervour with which local working people bound themselves to the movement for political reform. For people living in a state of economic precariousness, the hated 'pauper palace' was 'an insensitive and inappropriate mechanism through which to deal with cyclical unemployment and short-time working', as well as another tool in the armoury of the manufacturers to drive down wages by increasing the urgency for employment at any price.<sup>8</sup> The involvement of women in the local movement, evidenced principally by their prosecution and incarceration for participating in the riot of 30 April, may be seen as an additional

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<sup>6</sup> Thompson, *Chartism*, p.115.

<sup>7</sup> Emma Griffin, 'The Making of the Chartists: Popular Politics and Working-class Autobiography in Early Victorian Britain', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 129, No. 538 (June 2014), p.593 and p.587.

<sup>8</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p.15; Mather, *Public Order*, p.7.

marker of the malign influence of the PLAA in generating, 'passionate opposition...to the philosophy which lay behind it'.<sup>9</sup> It therefore seems safe to conclude that Chartism in Llanidloes was very much a 'knife and fork, bread and cheese question' - or more accurately, if we borrow from the local 'dietary' presented by George Meares to the Poor Law Commission, an 'oatmeal and potato, herring and bacon' question.

The Llanidloes riot of 30<sup>th</sup> April 1839 was in many ways an accident. It was a violent confrontation that occurred with the local forces of public order during the expectant period of waiting between the meeting of the National Convention of the Industrious Classes and the preparation of the National Petition for presentation to Parliament - a time when fears of revolt and repression were rife on both sides of the political and class divide. It was neither the beginning nor the end of Chartism in Llanidloes, for though the local movement was understandably chastened in the immediate aftermath of the riot, the Chartists remained a force to be reckoned with. Over the course of more than a decade thereafter we can catch glimpses of them, whether involved in violent resistance to new policing arrangements brought in with the setting up of a rural police force in Montgomeryshire in 1840; in agitating at local elections; through branch membership of the National Charter Association and participation in the Land Company; and finally providing membership and contributing to the costs of the Chartist leadership in the twilight years of the 1850s.<sup>10</sup> Further study is required into the longevity and reach of the movement in Llanidloes. Similarly, Llanidloes may prove a useful test of the hypothesis of Dorothy Thompson concerning the retreat of women from the

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<sup>9</sup> Thompson, *Chartists*, p.30.

<sup>10</sup> E.A Horsfall Turner, E.A., *A Municipal History of Llanidloes*, (Llanidloes, Privately Printed, 1908). p.183; Thompson, *Chartism*, p.354; 'Chartist Intelligence' *Northern Star*, 23 August 1851, p.1.



movement as Chartist branch organisation matured, and the worst predictions of the PLAA remained unfulfilled on the opening of the Caersws workhouse.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Thompson, *Chartists*, p.121

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### **Course Materials**

Donnachie, Ian, 'Block 7: Industrialisation, *A825 MA History Part 1*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2016) pp. 1-43.

Emsley, Clive, 'Block 4: Crime, Police and Penal Policy', *A825 MA History Part 1*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2016) pp. 1-34.

Lawrence, Paul 'Block 6: Poverty and Welfare', *A825 MA History Part 1*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2016) pp. 1-38.

Mitchell, Stuart and McHugh, Denise, 'Block 3: Historical study skills', *A825 MA History Part 1*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2016) pp. 1-132

Tiller, Kate, 'England', in 'Block 1: Historiography of Local and Regional History', *A825 MA History Part 1*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2016) pp. 11-41

## A826 Research Supervision Diary

Date of contact with tutor	Type of contact and topic discussed; changes agreed (if any)	Dates: TMAs submitted and received
22/05/2023	<p>Initial meeting to discuss the approaching TMA and to discuss how thoughts may have developed in terms of the proposed dissertation since the submission of the EMA at the end of A825. Discussed the dissertation proposal and reflected on the comments received from the examiner regarding the areas that would benefit from strengthening. Discussed the requirements of TMA 2. I mentioned that the submission date was just after I was due to head off on holiday for two weeks and that my autistic son would also be home from his residential college across the summer, so I might find it hard to concentrate on the dissertation in that period.</p>	<p>TMA 1 25/05/23 Rcd. 13/06/23</p>
07/07/2023	<p>E-mail contact to beg an extension on the deadline for TMA2 due to approaching holiday season and caring duties. Dispensation given, though I must admit it took a lot longer than anticipated and originally agreed to get the headspace to complete the TMA.</p>	<p>TMA 2 15/09/23 Rcd. 20/09/23</p>
29/09/2023	<p>Discussed TMA 2 and agreed the need to weave in secondary source material references into the mix of original research. Otherwise judged to be on the right lines. Discussed TMA 3 and the direction of the dissertation in general. Based on the experience of the last couple of months I asked to be able to concentrate on the writing of the next chapter of the dissertation and not worry too much about the reflective element in the next TMA,</p>	
15/12/2023	<p>Reflected on the feedback for TMA3 and the potential need to build additional historiographical discussion into the existing chapters, over and above any initial discussion in the Introduction to the dissertation. Reported on progress with the remainder of the dissertation, the bulk of which was now in being, and the remaining elements that still need to be completed. Discussed expectations around the length and nature of the Conclusion of a work of this nature and also some other technical questions around footnotes. Reassurance given on the basis of the work seen to date in terms of the line of argument being developed from the primary research, but recommendation to ensure that this is strengthened by reference to and comparison with available secondary literature.</p>	<p>TMA 3 26/10/23 Rcd 06/12/23</p>

