

Historical resources

An account of a Chartist riot in Mansfield.

Mansfield, Sutton-in-Ashfield, and other neighbouring places were much disturbed during the month of August 1839, by large assemblages of the politico-social party designated Chartists.

The 12th, 13th, and 14th of the month had been appointed by a so-called "National Convention" for the observance of a total cessation of labour throughout the length and breadth of the land.

At Mansfield, the town was in possession of the mob for some time. The Yeomanry were ordered out, but, having no officers to direct them, they were quickly stoned out of the Market Place. The Colonel was at Newstead, not anticipating any trouble at Mansfield.

Fortunately, however, a troop of Cavalry, en route, came into the town at the time the mob were at their worst. They were quickly marched into line in the Market Place; and, as the mob refused to disperse, the orders "draw swords" and "charge" were given. Such a scurrying away as followed had never before been witnessed in the town.

With the flat of the sword many a blow was given, and the flying Chartists were followed by the soldiery. A number of the rioters, with a view of escaping into Leeming Street, ran up the

passage in Church Street, between the shops of Mr. Andrews and Mr. Wyld, not for one moment dreaming a mounted soldier could follow. But here they were mistaken - for one of them, who had been struck with some missile, singled out his man, set his steed to the steps, mounted them, and caught his man before he reached Leeming Street. Extraordinary as the feat was, it was really well accomplished, and there are those still living who saw it happen, or heard of it immediately after it had occurred.

A further point - the back alley where the rioters fled became known as 'Dragoon Court', and later 'Dragon Court'. It is still there today.



Accounts of Edward Unwin's actions

An extract from the Duke of Newcastle's diaries which refers to a letter from Edward Unwin. In the letter Unwin has told the Duke that the Chartists were growing in numbers and were well armed:

"I this day received a letter from Mr Unwin a magistrate residing at Sutton in Ashfield in Notts who informs me that the people of the town have to the number of 350 (which is still increasing) enrolled themselves into the 'National Association', for political purposes, that are training diligently by night and sometimes by day, that some muskets and arms have arrived from Birmingham and that he believes that at Mansfield and all the neighbouring villages the same system is adopted, but hitherto he is unacquainted with its extent, but he believes it to be spreading and formidable - and so do I, for I believe that it will continue until a contest shall decide the issue and the present very high price of bread may induce many to join the ranks of the disaffected who otherwise would refuse to mix in such dangerous company."

The Marquis of Normanby's view of Edward Unwin's actions from Parliamentary records. Taken from Accounts and Papers, Volume 18, Part 1, By Great Britain. Parliament. House of Lords. 1841.

The Marquis of Normanby's opinion reflects many other people's view, which was that Edward Unwin had acted outside the law and his actions were not justified.

