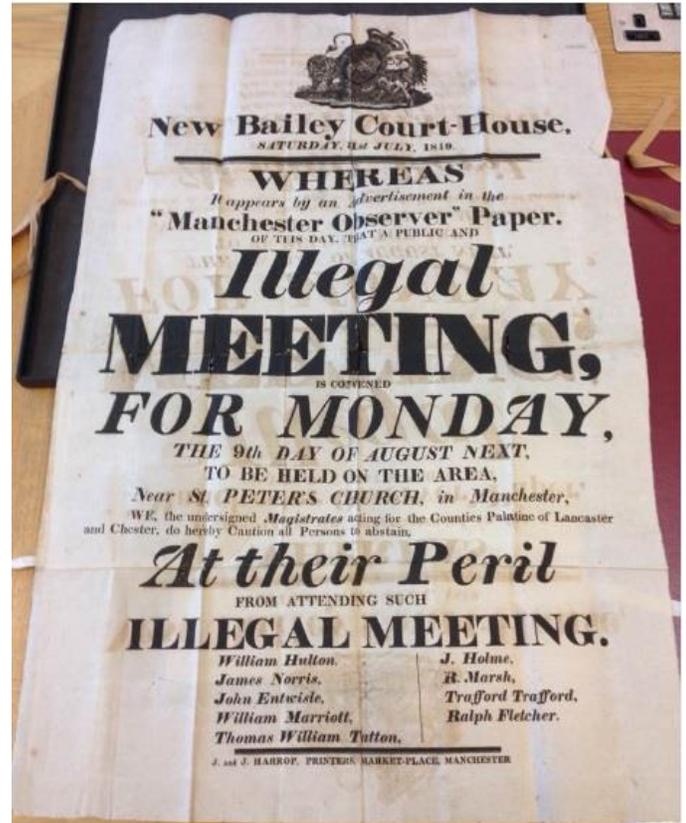


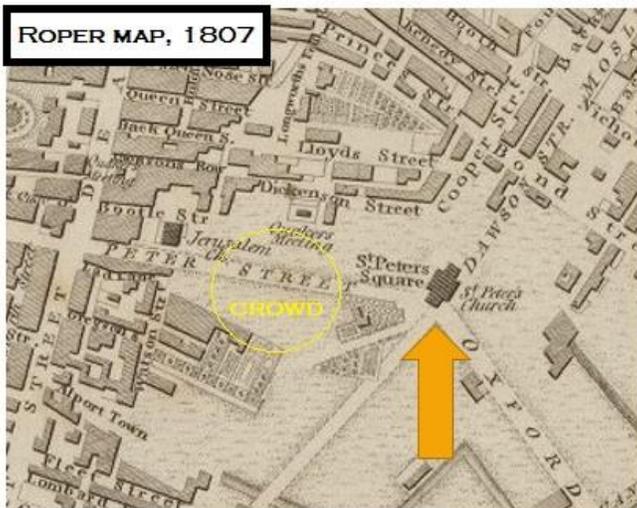
The great E.P. Thompson wrote in his magisterial *The Making of the English Working Class* that “1819 was a rehearsal for 1832.” Thompson drew a direct line from the Peterloo Massacre to the Great Reform Act. Indeed, the crowd of 60,000 that gathered in an open space near St. Peter’s Church in central Manchester on August 16, 1819, came to hear reform-minded speakers. Famously, the local magistrates ordered the crowd dismissed by volunteer cavalry regiments, during which 15 people died and over 600 were injured. In a 2006 survey conducted by *The Guardian*, Peterloo followed only the Putney Debates during the English Civil War in place of radical political importance in Britain. In short, the Peterloo Massacre was a watershed political episode in British history. If seeking out the Peterloo site today, one needs some imagination. Modern city blocks fill the space, and a small circular plaque on the side of a hotel offers the only reminder to passersby of the event.

My dissertation asks a fundamental question: what happens to locations of hallmark episodes in British history? The project examines how the development of these sites plays a role in the forging of a national narrative. This work will contribute to the histories of preservation and commemoration. One of the sites my research interrogates is Peterloo, as this heritage site has suffered from erasure for nearly two centuries. My project explores why Peterloo has been systematically excluded in the process of memorialization.

The grant kindly awarded by the Society for the Study of Labour History allowed me to undertake research at several archives in Greater Manchester (John Rylands Library, the Main Library at the University of Manchester, and the Working Class Movement Library in Salford) and Coventry (Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick). The Rylands Library holds a collection of letters, papers, and original placards assembled by the Rev. William Robert Hay, a leading figure on the magistrates’ side in the Peterloo controversy. The Main Library at the university holds an extensive map collection, which shows various points in the development of the city of Manchester. Both the Working Class Movement Library and the Modern Records Centre hold significant collections of leftist pamphlets produced in the twentieth century. The latter two archives demonstrate how various political parties adopted those at Peterloo as their predecessors.

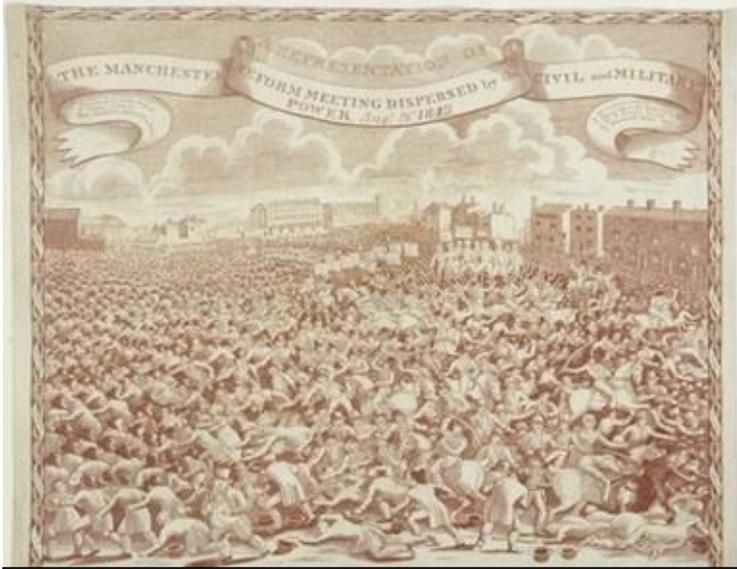


NUMEROUS HAND BILLS IN THE LEAD UP TO PETERLOO CAN BE FOUND AT THE RYLANDS LIBRARY. THIS ONE, MEASURING 29" X 20" AND UNDERSIGNED BY LOCAL MAGISTRATES, WARNED THE PUBLIC NOT TO ATTEND THE MEETING ON AUGUST 9TH. THE RALLY WAS POSTPONED A WEEK.
COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER



IN 1819, THE OPEN AREA IMMEDIATELY WEST OF ST. PETER’S SQUARE LOOKED SIMILAR TO THE WAY IT APPEARED IN 1807, WHILE WITHIN TWO DECADES OF PETERLOO, THE SITE HAD BEEN ENTIRELY BUILT OVER.
COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

The site of the Peterloo Massacre was both made and destroyed by the industrial city. If such uneven parliamentary representation was to generate unrest, it was bound to happen in a location most negatively affected: the new industrial city, and in this case, Manchester. St. Peter's Field carried political significance until the mid-1830s, the site as a public meeting place. That being said, the location of Peterloo looked entirely different within a generation of the event, as the burgeoning city engulfed the open field. Though urban development consumed the protest area, the buildings erected there carried their own political meaning as St. Peter's Square became the civic center of Manchester. The first Free Trade Hall opened in 1840, with a more imposing version built in the 1850s to celebrate the repeal of the Corn Laws. By 1880, the town hall and central train station stood just a block off St. Peter's Square. During the interwar years, the Great War cenotaph as well as the Manchester Central Library were erected on the square.



COMMEMORATIVE ITEMS OF ALL KINDS WERE PRODUCED IN THE AFTERMATH OF PETERLOO. PICTURED HERE ARE A HANDKERCHIEF AND A CLOSE-UP OF A PRINT WHERE THE ARTIST DEPICTS THE CAVALRYMEN WITH BATTLE AXES INSTEAD OF SABRES.

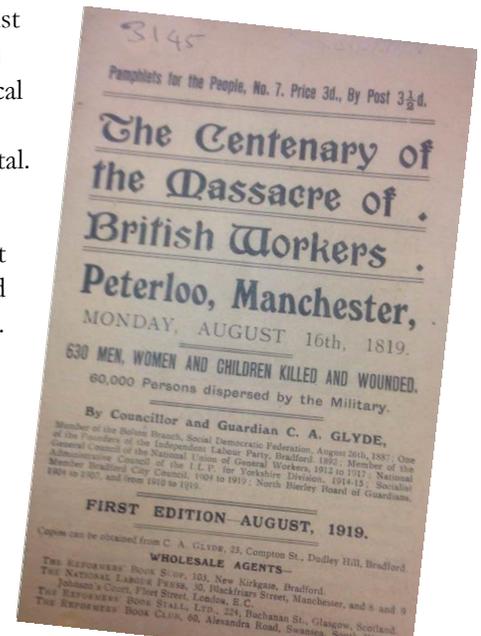
COURTESY OF WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT LIBRARY



In the nineteenth century, Peterloo was claimed by reformers affiliated with the Chartist movement and worker's unions. Memories of Peterloo began immediately in artistic prints and politically-charged verses. The anniversary of the massacre became a part of Manchester's radical calendar, featuring dinners, speeches, songs, and toasts. Artifacts from the event became collectable memorabilia. Also, arranging reunions of Peterloo "veterans" brought political capital.

Interesting to this research project was how different political groups attempted to adopt the 1819 event in the twentieth century. For Leftists, the centenary of Peterloo could not have come at a better time. Increased political radicalism in Britain followed the Great War and Russian Revolution, and the Representation of the People Act of 1918 quieted reform rhetoric. In this setting, socialists applied a Marxist interpretation to Peterloo, downplaying its political significance. Rather, their perspective gauged the event as a textbook example of class conflict, with capitalism ruthlessly preying on workers.

One can see the political spectrum of Britain in the pamphlets printed for the hundredth anniversary of Peterloo, the event described differently depending on the author and his party affiliation. Socialists of all degrees claimed heritage of the event, some more tempered in their Marxist rhetoric than others. An initial conclusion of this research is that the adoption of Peterloo by the political Left compromised twentieth-century efforts to memorialize the site. As memorials concede legitimacy, conservative officials did not want Peterloo rebranded in the interwar period. Moving forward, I suspect the 1919 Peterloo centenary will prove a worthy episode to illustrate the rebranding of Conservative opposition though the broad dilemma remains of translating nineteenth-century political questions into twentieth-century terms.



THIS PAMPHLET OFFERS A MARXIST INTERPRETATION OF THE PETERLOO MASSACRE. ITS SECOND CHAPTER IS ENTITLED "THE WORKERS MARCH LIKE 'SHEEP TO THEIR SLAUGHTER AND MUTILATION' BY CAPITALISM."

COURTESY OF THE MODERN RECORDS CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK