

Peterloo

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What happened at St. Peter's Fields? Whose fault was it?

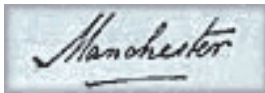
Between 1815 and 1819, there was a series of disturbances around Britain. Political meetings were held to protest to the government and to demand reforms. The climax came in 1819, when 60,000 people gathered at St. Peter's Fields, Manchester. The main speaker at the meeting was Henry Hunt, a leading political reformer. The crowd gathered to hear Hunt speak about reform.



However, the local magistrates decided to arrest Hunt. They used the local yeomanry (part-time cavalry) to seize him. In the chaos that followed, eleven people died and many were injured. This event soon became known as 'Peterloo', after Britain's recent victory at the Battle of Waterloo (1815).

Afterwards, there were different views about Peterloo. Some people blamed the magistrates; others cited the violence of the crowd. All sorts of people, including MPs, attacked the behaviour of the yeomanry, saying they were guilty of over-reacting because the meeting was peaceful. However, the government chose to defend the magistrates and the yeomanry. Then, to add insult to injury, the government introduced new laws to restrict political rights.

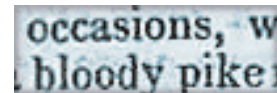
Find out more from these original sources:



Home Office advice before the meeting, 1819



Engraving of events at St Peter's Fields, 1819



Letter on events at St Peter's Fields



Letter on the conduct of the magistrates