

Useful Information

The Peterloo Witness Project

<http://peterloowitness1819.weebly.com>

The Peterloo Memorial Campaign

www.peterloomassacre.org

Digital Peterloo Collection at the John Rylands Library

<https://luna.manchester.ac.uk/luna/servlet/Manchester~24~24>

Manchester Central Library - Archives and Local Studies

https://secure.manchester.gov.uk/directories/448/archives_and_local_history

GMLives (Archives catalogues for Archives+)

www.gmlives.org.uk

Ancestry

www.ancestry.co.uk

findmypast

www.findmypast.co.uk

Family Search

www.familysearch.org

Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society

mlfhs.org.uk

The National Archives

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk



Books

The Casualties of Peterloo by M.L. Bush

The Peterloo Massacre by Joyce Marlow

The Peterloo Massacre by Robert Reid

Peterloo: The Story of the Manchester Massacre by Jacqueline Riding

Return to Peterloo by Robert Poole

My Ancestor was in the British Army by Michael & Christopher Watts

Archives +

Manchester & Lancashire Family History Society

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St. Peter's Square, Manchester, M2 5PD

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Researching Peterloo Ancestors

On 16 August, 1819, over 60,000 men, women and children came from all over Lancashire to St Peter's Field to attend a mass rally and to hear the famous orator Henry Hunt, a pioneer of working class radicalism, call for parliamentary reform. Nervous of events, the magistrates had positioned special constables in and around the crowd and mobilised the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry. In addition, regular troops (who included the 15th Hussars and the 31st and 88th Regiments of Foot) were stationed on the outskirts of town. Before Henry Hunt was able to speak to the crowd, the magistrates ordered his arrest and within minutes what popularly became known as the 'Peterloo Massacre', in an ironic comparison to the Battle of Waterloo which had taken place four years earlier in 1815, had begun.

By the end of the day, a number of people had been killed, many imprisoned, and hundreds had been injured. Due to the large numbers assembled, and the motives of commentators to exaggerate or downplay attendance, it is difficult to obtain an accurate estimate of how just many people were actually there. The estimates of attendees vary widely. In his memoirs, Henry Hunt gave the number as between 180,000 – 200,000.

Who attended and where were they from?

A 'great assembly' had been organised by the Manchester Patriotic Union formed by radicals from the 'Manchester Observer' newspaper. Men, women and children came, not only from the local area but from towns and villages across the North West, some walking nearly 30 miles to attend. There was a particularly large contingent from Oldham and Royton (10,000).

Contingents came from: Altrincham, Ashton under Lyne, Atherton, Bolton, Bury, Chadderton, Crompton, Eccles, Failsworth, Gee Cross, Heywood, Irlam, Lees, Leigh, Middleton, Mossley, Oldham, Rochdale, Royton, Saddleworth, Salford, Stalybridge, Stretford, Stockport, Urmston, Westhoughton, Whitefield and Wigan.

Who else may have been involved besides average working class persons?

Magistrates, Special Constables, newspaper reporters, a substantial number of yeoman cavalry, regular troops and militia, eyewitnesses to the event, and finally friends and associates of Henry Hunt.

Beginning your search

Having already started your family tree and begun to establish factual information about your ancestors, you may begin to suspect that one or more of your family had been involved with the events at Peterloo. Or perhaps a family story has placed a member of your family at the event. There are a variety of online sources for you to look at. Numerous accounts of the day can be found in first-hand reports to Magistrates, trial witness statements, newspaper reports, inquest reports and books. Caution however should be taken with these written reports and statements as they vary and could be wildly inaccurate depending on who was giving their version of events. More contemporary accounts and analysis of events of the day have also been written.

Where do I look?

Looking for people in this time period is not an easy task. This time frame predates Civil Registration in 1837 and the first Census, taken in 1841, therefore, you will be mainly reliant on parish records, directory entries, Rate books, MI's and Wills. Finding the wealthier individuals is easier as you are more likely to find these people in resources other than just parish registers. The likes of weavers and spinners will prove more challenging. You may in fact not find sufficient information in order to make any conclusive connections with your immediate ancestors and the events of Peterloo. As a starting point, there is a useful list of those killed and injured as well as the magistrates and members of the Manchester Yeomanry on the MLFHS web site – see www.mlfhs.org.uk/articles/article_index.php

Parish Records

Parish records of baptisms, marriages and burials date from 1538 in Church of England parishes and are the prime source for family historians prior to civil registration. Many parish records are deposited with county record offices, some are available on microfilm and others are online. Manchester Central Library (Archives+) hold both physical and online archives and local collections. However, what is available is not comprehensive and may have previously suffered the ravages of time. Do remember, that your search may take you outside Manchester or Lancashire as your ancestor may not have been from Lancashire originally but have come from a neighbouring county or even further afield.

Some of the protesters were likely to be Non-conformists, with baptisms and burials recorded in chapel registers. These registers are

are available on microfilm at Archives+ and online at www.familysearch.org and www.bmdregisters.co.uk.

Will and Monumental Inscriptions (MIs)

A useful selection of Wills appear online on websites like Ancestry, findmypast and Family Search and which may be worth a look. You can also look for any Monumental Inscriptions which are typically carved into gravestones or other memorials. MI's of the city's closed churchyards are available at Manchester Central Library, mostly on microfilm (MFPR 1945-1955). You can also see a list of these churchyards in the archives catalogue for Archives+. Many church graveyard monumental inscriptions have been name-indexed by the Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society and are available for members of the society to search online.

Yeomanry and Militia

Many of the yeomanry and militia men at Peterloo were former military men and as such may have been present at Waterloo in 1815. It is worth looking for any additional information for soldiers and cavalry men within military datasets found on websites like Ancestry and findmypast. In addition, for those who had served in the Army, there are likely to be records at The National Archives which may provide useful information. However, it is worth noting that the 120 men who formed the Manchester & Salford yeomanry were volunteers and included shopkeepers, publicans, watchmakers, insurance agents, tobacconists, farriers, horse breakers and brewers. These men tended to hold Tory political opinions and had a deep hatred of radicals. The Cheshire Yeomanry were considered to be disciplined troops.

Other Collections

A number of casualties were seen at the Manchester Royal Infirmary and it is worth looking for any information within the collections held at Archives+.

You may also be able to identify people by using the Rate Books. These can be found on findmypast and date from 1706 to 1900. Records are indexed by name and therefore it is not possible to search by address. If you wish to check a particular address in a rate book, these are available on microfilm at Manchester Central Library.

Trade Directories are also a useful resource that can add further factual information to what you have already gathered. A Directory can establish a location, help to narrow down someone's date of death, confirm a move or retirement and place people between the census enumerations.