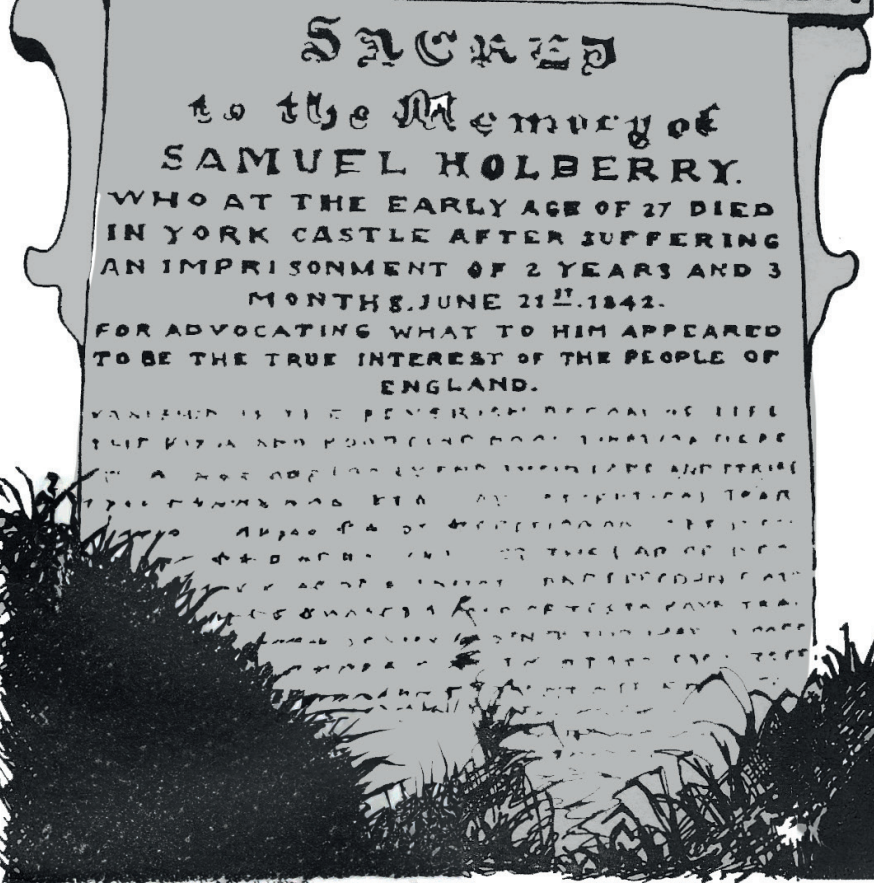




ESSAYS FROM THE HOLBERRY SOCIETY FOR
THE STUDY OF SHEFFIELD LABOUR HISTORY: VOL 2

THE BATTLE OF WALKLEY AND OTHER WORKING CLASS IMPOSITIONS

Principle 5 Pamphlet No: 7

Published in 2025 by:

Principle 5 Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre

Aizlewoods Mill

Nursery Street

Sheffield

S38GG

Principle **P5** FIVE

The articles in this pamphlet first appeared in various pamphlets published by the Holberry Society for the Study of Sheffield Labour History.



Printed by Footprint Workers Co-operative, 16 Back Sholebroke Avenue, Leeds, LS7 3HB

PREFACE

What follows is the second collection of highlights from the archives of the Holberry Society for the Study of Sheffield Labour History.

John Baxter's *Battle of Walkley* captures the explosion of popular anger that erupted following the eviction of a recently unemployed man and his family - including a sick child - from a property in Walkley in 1922. Drawing on oral histories recorded decades later from those present that day, combined with conventional documentary sources, Baxter reconstructs a pivotal moment in Sheffield's social history. The protest resulted in the imprisonment of two councillors, one Communist and the other Labour. When a death occurred in the ensuing melee, it sparked a massive funeral procession from the victim's home to City Road cemetery.

Wyn Albaya's piece reflects on her husband Joe's decision to return to his native Spain to fight for the Spanish Republic in the late 1930s. Originally published in the Holberry Bulletin, this contribution comes from an active Society member who spent her childhood in one of the city centre's early council flats. Politicised through her involvement with the Education Settlement at Upperthorpe, she trained as a teacher and later turned to writing. Her book *Behind the Green Door* chronicled life at the Settlement.

The third document, by Bill Moore, originated from a Holberry Society agitation leaflet highlighting a spectacular 1930s Sheffield protest—material we produced for a major City Hall rally protesting early Thatcherite cuts. The Society distributed a thousand leaflets on the City Hall steps and subsequently created a touring exhibition about this pivotal 1930s moment. Moore later expanded this work into a full-length study with assistance from the City Library.

Finally, Sam Holmes offers another unique stream-of-consciousness memoir. His affectionate yet perceptive examination of women's lives in the Big Yard on Thomas Street, where he was born in 1909, makes compelling reading. His distinctive writing style perhaps reflects his literary 'schooling' through *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, a book he recalled being given to all new union members entering the trades.

- Sheffield, June 2025



"Maybe at some stage...[the Holberry Society] will rise from the dead - what it stood for is still unfulfilled. That fulfilment will only come when every schoolchild in Sheffield is aware of the struggles of its forebears over the last two hundred years. I know of no city anywhere in world whose citizens have a finer history of unremitting struggle, yet our children are taught none of it."

"So here's to the day when they will all know."

- Bill Moore

Introduction: Let the People Speak!

Reflections on Radical History

Oral history was in vogue from the late 1970s into the early 1980s. It challenged traditional historical methods and was widely adopted by the history workshop movement, in which Ruskin College -with its workers-only entry policy - was central. Raphael Samuel, a leading figure there and one of the editors of *History Workshop Journal*, publicised endeavours like ours during the 'history from below' days of our beginnings in Sheffield in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Bill Moore had recorded interviews with many Communist Party elders. John Baxter was able to harness interest in the adult education service, combining taped interviews with elders and formal local history classes. This led to projects such as the *Battle of Walkley* exhibition and the publication reprinted here.

Community history merged with community politics, involving tenants' associations in Netherthorpe and the wider inner city. This led to interviews at coffee mornings, lunch clubs, and group discussions in recreation rooms. Other members had their own approaches. Bev Jackson worked with Ted Furniss, a retired Netherthorpe hairdresser who had shaved members of the Mooney and Garvin gangs in the interwar years. She recorded and transcribed his story, helping him write *The Walls of Jericho* - a great success.

What we accumulated was a couple of hundred tapes and many transcripts, most typed by our brilliant team secretary at our Normandale Adult Education base camp on a secondary school campus. The tapes and transcripts survived the break-up of the Adult Education Service and the dispersal of its staff into the new tertiary colleges for 16-18 year olds. The Adult Service barely survived on a shoestring budget, focusing on mathematics and English literacy. We found a home for the transcripts, recorded some more, and planned an A-Z publication of Sheffield street life.

Our mid-1980s turn towards political activism, which trumped history, left this project incomplete. It exists as an alphabetically ordered series of cards, with only the 'Z' card remaining blank. It covered numerous topics: welfare, diet, poverty and pawnshops, street games, gang activities, strikes, political protests, playground politics when Labour drove out the Tories and Liberals in the 1920s, shopping, Bands of Hope and temperance movements, and many more. The City Library conducted many taped interviews, but were they used? Universities seemed little interested in Sheffield's social history. The Council's radical Employment Department library was dumped in a skip later in the 1980s. The writing was on the wall for building social and political questioning from the grassroots.

FINDING SAMUEL HOLBERRY

One of the major accomplishments of the Holberry Society was the rediscovery of the Chartist martyr Samuel Holberry. For over half a century, I have been intermittently researching the life, times, and 'afterlife' of a revolutionary Chartist I once called "the English Blanqui." In a larger context, I have been studying Chartism and its radical forerunner movements - from the 1790s English and Scottish Jacobins through to the post-Napoleonic War radical mass movements around and after Peterloo in 1819, and the bitter fight (and betrayal) surrounding the 1832 Reform Act.

Edward Thompson reached there first with his classic *The Making of the Working Class* (1963 and 1968 editions), but he invited positive responses. I published academic articles, both individually and jointly, in the 1970s and 1980s, extending beyond his 1832 time boundary. Through the Holberry Society (1978-2002), we continued studying local struggles into the twentieth century: the General Strike, unemployed battles in the 1930s, and Aid for Spain in the late 1930s. We discovered new martyrs like Arthur Newsome, who died in Spain. The Holberry story has remained with me, unfinished, since my first encounter as a 24-year-old postgraduate. While grasping basic truths about Marxist thinking and practice, I was still learning about this great industrial city as a part-time writer for the Sheffield Free Press. I met the old comrades: Bill, still a Communist, and Sam, who had embraced Trotskyism after Hungary. They told me where Holberry's grave was. I visited it and, strangely, through moonlighting with an article in the Sheffield Star, managed to find and rescue Holberry's battered bust from an attic in S11.

The Society followed, established in 1978, and soon tapped into the organised working-class strength of the city's labour movement. Inside the cover of the pamphlet that Bill, Sam, and I produced was a defiant photograph of the battered bust with its broken nose. It lived in our small terrace in Crookesmoor for several years until I joined the Labour Party and quickly became local secretary of the 'Red Flag'-promoting Netherthorpe Ward branch in 1980. I was Enid Hattersley's agent one year. She was the larger-than-life Chair of Libraries and Arts who really 'understood' Holberry, and the bust was restored. In her mayoral year, she took the Holberry story everywhere—even down to Land's End. I remember her telling me about her encounter with her Penzance equivalent. She was a force of nature.

We published the Holberry pamphlet in 1978, with two more editions in 1980 and 1986. Over 5,000 copies were sold. The 1986 edition included a 'Herstory' addendum explaining Mary Holberry's early and later life. Her widowhood and remarriage as Mary Pearson is detailed, along with the arrival of her children (she tragically lost her baby Samuel John in 1841), starting with Holberry Pearson in 1845.

Mary's story is documented in recent writing. She was a Chartist prisoner's wife, then a respected Chartist widow lauded for her dignity and personal strength. In the mid-1840s she married a Chartist-supporting publican from the Park district in 1845, and by the decade's end they had moved to town. They spent over twenty years running the Seven Stars in Trippet Lane, maintaining connections to the organised trade union-based working class. Their pub was the scene, in 1854, of the wake following the death of Joseph Kirk, lifelong file-makers' union activist and 'father of the trades,' who had organised the unions to attend the Peterloo protest at the Brocco in October 1819. Holberry featured in my two-volume PhD thesis, *Origins of the Social War* (1976). He appears at the end of an essay I wrote for the South Yorkshire Essays collection published by SYCC in 1975. There is a short biographical entry in the Dictionary of Labour Biography. The Society shared our material with the writer of an entry in the new Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. The late Malcolm Chase gave him biographical prominence in a key chapter of the most recent Chartist movement text in 2009.

I wrote one substantial piece involving Holberry in 2002. After surviving in further education - Marxists in academia having little chance -

and while still trying to cause trouble with the red flag after the Poll Tax battle was won, I snapped my patella tendon and took four months to walk again during my recovery.

I wrote an 8,000-word piece called *Passing the Torch of Liberty* about radical generations in Sheffield. The story concerned three political generations of what became a filmmaking family. It began with William, a grinder of optical glass and a Jacobin United movement revolutionary in 1795-1803. It continued with him and his son James, both arrested at the Owleton grinding wheel and trapped by Oliver the Spy in 1817 around the time of the Pentrich Rising. Father and son were locked up for the rest of 1817 without trial in Winchester Gaol.

This led to James and his son James junior's role in early Chartism. James junior, a filmmaker like his father, became the Chartist Convention delegate in July 1839. He was close to the revolutionary plotting that began in London as the Convention imploded. He tried to win over the local unions but failed. Fearing arrest, the 35-year-old set sail for the USA with some key local Chartist committee men. Holberry and his revolutionary 'circle' picked up the pieces. My piece ended by speculating how Holberry would have interacted with and reacted to this third generational failure.

Looking back at our 1970s and 1980s storytelling, a few details had slipped through our fingers early on. In the 1990s, I discovered the *United Services Journal*, which chronicled the 'stations' of British Army regiments. Holberry appears not to have gone to Ireland. While at Weedon, he was often in Northampton, where radical public meetings criticised the policy of repression in Ireland. He also attended a night school where politics were possibly part of the curriculum. He spent a year in London after his brief first time in Sheffield and became a Chartist there.

Did anything increase our research capability? Yes, technology did. When I retired from college teaching in 2015, I subscribed to the British Library's Newspapers online. Word searching—requiring skills in choosing keywords and names—massively accelerated finding and checking after years of ponderous microfilm scrolling. The same applied to accessing census data online. Helped by Joe Stanley, then a postgraduate at Hallam with more sophisticated search methods, we expanded Edward Thompson's earlier examination of the autumn and winter of West Riding popular radicalism just before and after Peterloo in August 1819.

he study focused on the ‘road to insurrection’ throughout the West Riding, culminating in the Easter 1820 attempted risings in Yorkshire and Scotland. The Borthwick Institute at York University published it in 2020. It built on my 1984 academic article exploring Chartist notions of moral and physical force and examining ways in which ‘resistance’ was deemed justified in law, constitutional practice, and historical precedent. I brought this new thinking into the story that Holberry was at the heart of.

THE FINAL COLLABORATION

I worked on the Holberry manuscript after that. Covid meant isolation and stress for a couple of years, but I did return to amending the document. These last two years, the Holberry Society Trust was boosted by new sponsors and genuine allies. Principle Five found me through my lengthy article on the history of local co-operatives from the 1790s to the 1870s.

I was encouraged to find a publisher for the new Holberry study. I met Steven Kay of 1889 Books, who had been researching the Holberrys and had examined all the sources, including those at the National Archives that I had consulted back when they were at Chancery Lane. He had found and transcribed the remaining ‘lost’ prison letters. Steven added greater depth to the analysis of the trial and Holberry’s tortured imprisonment and declining health. He extracted much more information about the one Holberry personal artefact we possess: a cloth letter envelope containing a petition and authentic signature. He added sources in an appendix and had us both furiously double-checking our newspaper sources. This collaboration produced substantial results. The jointly authored book will be published in Autumn 2025.

— *John Baxter, Sheffield, June 2025*

The Battle of Walkley

by John Baxter

“Well we’d heard about the eviction. We’d been at Rivelin all day. We were all out of work. It was similar to how it is today. It were terrible. From the 1921 Colliers’ Strike onwards when we left school it were like that. There was quite a few of us. There were four of us that day, myself, Tommy Stones, Albert Marples, and John Maycock. We knew there was going to be a commotion through the eviction. We just happened to be passing the top of Walkley Bank. We could hear shouting. We went onto Providence Road to see the crowd. Being lads of fourteen or fifteen we were full of excitement. We went round the back up this other yard and went onto these hen cotes and stood there watching it. That’s when they brought the bed and other stuff out. There were two kiddies lived at that house. Then there was a real shindig. Police started...I don’t know who started it. They went mad, went mad with truncheons flying all over. Next thing everything died down and we heard this man had been killed.”

This extract from a taped interview with George Acaster made in 1982, sixty years after the events of 7 June 1922, illustrates how the memory can retain sharp images of past events. Similar eye-witnesses taped between 1981-2 have added to the following reconstruction which also drew on newspaper and other printed records. The Holberry Society for the Study of Sheffield Labour History, with the support of the Normandale Adult Education Division, produced this essay to support the “Battle of Walkley” exhibition.

THE BACKGROUND

With 49,000 registered unemployed on benefit and with thousands more having exhausted this and scraping along on poor relief, Sheffield was in the firm grip of the post-war industrial recession by the summer of 1922. The Cundy family of 8 Court, 2 House, Providence Road, Walkley – Harold, the father, Annie, the mother, and two young children, Barbara and Harold – were a typical family on relief. Harold had been laid off from his job as a corporation labourer early in 1921.

For a while they survived the hardship. Inevitably their difficulties increased. In the Spring of 1922, their landlady started proceedings to get them evicted. The magistrates accepted her claim that the Cundys had rent arrears. The two children were suffering from measles and a friendly doctor obtained a brief postponement of the eviction over the Whitsun holiday. However, on the morning of the Wednesday 7th June P.C. Tippitt of the Walkley police arrived with the bailiffs to supervise the removal of the Cundy family's few possessions from the two roomed back-to-back. The job was completed in minutes leaving the wretched family to contemplate its homeless future squatting on the cobbles of 8 court. So began a sequence of events which would result in a death and the imprisonment of working-class activists including two city councillors.

THE 7TH JUNE PROTEST: PRELIMINARIES

The Cundy adults took immediate stock of their situation. The children were still ill. They were left with a neighbour and Annie set off to search for rooms. Harold, went off to get the help of Arthur Butcher, one of Walkley's newly elected Labour councillors. Butcher himself had been sacked from his job as an engineer. He now supported his Labour Party and National Unemployed Workers Movement activity by running a small greengrocery business. Cundy and Butcher were seen talking at Tay Street opposite Crookesmoor Vestry Hall, an unemployed pay station and meeting place, around midday. Butcher took notes on Cundy's case. The established Unemployed Workers local and national policy on evictions was to oppose them by direct action when alternative accommodation was not offered by the authorities. In light of this, Butcher addressed a growing crowd of hearers:

“This is dirty work. We have a big unemployed organisation here in Sheffield. We are not going to allow the authorities to turn a man out into the street who is unemployed. We are going to march from here to West Bar. We shall pick up more on the way. We are going to protest to the authorities against turning a man out of his house. If they don't let this man, his wife, family, and goods go back into the house, I for one will put them back in defiance of the authorities.”

After some discussion around three hundred men marched off with Butcher to the main unemployed speakers' corner at West Bar. Several

hundred supporters from the Kelvin area and the streets along the route swelled the numbers to a thousand gathered round the 'Iron Duke' (a cast iron urinal) outside of which speakers customarily stood. A deputation visited the nearby Guardians' offices but to no effect. Butcher was joined by other leading figures in the local Unemployed Workers branch. Alfred Haydock, another engineer laid off in 1921 and now President of the Sheffield N.U.W.M branch, and Albert Smith, an unemployed councillor who won the November 1921 St Philips ward election, both joined Butcher in denouncing the Cundys' treatment. Both were associated with the newly formed Communist Party. It appears from newspaper accounts that Butcher provided the main influence. His speech continued where it left off at Tay Street:

"I have a matter to bring forward to you. It relates to a man named Cundy who has been ejected from a house at Walkley. This could have occurred to any one of us. I feel so strongly on the point. I suggest we march in a body to Walkley and put the furniture back." They set off soon after, marching four abreast in the direction of Walkley. They marched back via the Crookesmoor Road pay station and eventually arrived on South Road. Sections of the march sang "The Red Flag". Eye-witnesses testified to one strong rendition as a human tide of angry unemployed surged down Parsonage Crescent, across Providence Road towards the narrow passageway to 8 Court. Here a small group of local police waited...

THE 7TH JUNE PROTEST: CLIMAX

Superintendent Hebb, Inspector Oates, Sergeant Skelton, and five police constables had been sent as an advance party of police in the light of the information filtering through to the authorities all that long hot summer's afternoon. The weight of numbers pushed the police down the passage, across the court and up against the door of the Cundys' former home. Supt. Hebb stared into a sea of hostile faces and reminded the protestors of the 'illegality' of any interference with the eviction. Councillor Butcher pushed his way through the crowd and stood on a window sill. Head and shoulders above the police he could see around 300 men tightly packed in the yard, a few hundred more in the adjacent yards and a few dozen more poled into shed and hen house roofs and

on walls. Down the passage in Providence Road hundreds of sympathetic spectators gathered from nearby Walkley and Crookes streets. Butcher wanted a peaceful restoration of the Cundy family to its home. He asked the police to leave. They said they had their duty to perform. Butcher spoke in forceful fashion against a background of mounting frustration in the court:

“Now men, you know what we are here for. We are going to put this man back into his house. You have fought and bled in this war. This might happen to all of us. You know what has happened. This man, his wife, and his children have been turned out of their home. They have got to get it back. I asked the Superintendent to take his men away and we will see that no violence is used. He does not agree. If it means fight, we are going to fight. We will deal with the authorities afterwards. Shall we go begging to the woman who has turned them out or shall we see to it that this man’s furniture is put back? I don’t think it is any use going to the woman...”

Shouts of ‘put them back, put them back’ greeted Butcher. A way was made through the crowd for the furniture to go back. Haydock and two other unemployed leaders, Frank Horsefield and Charles Baker, tried to start the re-instatement in an orderly fashion. Horsefield reminded the police that they were not wanted in the yard. The sight of the two Cundy children being brought forward on a mattress brought tensions to boiling point. The police started feeling for their truncheons as opportunely for them Sgt. Rose and sixteen men, some on horses, arrived. A shovel was hurled from a henhouse roof, followed by a few stones and bricks. The police prepared to charge. More stones, bricks, scrap iron, sticks, and other missiles rained down as they moved forward to clear the court. Butcher, pleading for calm, was dragged by his collar off the windowsill. Truncheons flailed in all directions at heads, arms, and legs. For ten minutes all hell had broken loose in the close confines of the court. Most unemployed tried to avoid the police onslaught by jumping over walls into gardens, yards, and back-alleys. One man ended up in a cucumber frame. The majority emptied out of the narrow passage into Providence Road. So great was the force of the human tide out of the court that a stone pillar was snapped off at its base. Some of the unemployed stood their ground and fought. Further police reinforcements on horses – known as ‘cossacks’ – put them to flight. A

dozen police were badly hurt including the senior officers and at least sixty unemployed severely injured. Four of the unemployed were taken to the Royal Hospital in an ambulance.

Eye-witnesses living in the early 1980s recalled the different impacts the fighting had on themselves and their families. Arnold Jowle, a young unemployed man living on Commonsides in 1922 expressed the viewpoint of a moderately sympathetic spectator on the fringe of events:

“Nobody was working in them days. We all use to go about in gangs. There were meetings all over. Word got around about this eviction. People said, ‘where are you going?’. ‘I’m going down Providence Road’. ‘I’ll go with you’. Crookes, Walkley area people came to see what was happening. The unemployed gathered round there. There were hundreds, a big do. They brought in mounted police. They didn’t fight, not a lot. You couldn’t fight mounted police. There was pushing. We ran away. The others couldn’t get away because it was a narrow gateway out of the yard. It petered out. There’s been some grim times...”

Iris Harvey, in June 1922 a young member of the Cooper household across the road at 47 Providence Road recalled in 1982:

“All at once with us living so near Parsonage Crescent me mother says, ‘oh there’s a jazz band coming down Parsonage Crescent, come to the passage end to see’. But when we got to the passage end she says, ‘oh dear’. We saw the unemployed, the mounted police. The unemployed had got big shovels, big garden shovels and things. Next thing the police were hitting the unemployed with their batons and the unemployed were hitting out with their big spades. Me mother was completely shocked. She ran back into the house and took her apron off and ran us on to me grandmother’s house in Walkley Crescent Road. She was in a terrible state because she saw this fighting going on.”

Susannah Crooks, in June 1922 a young mother of the Illingworth family waiting for her father’s return at a terrace in Cromwell Street, remembers teatime on June 7th:

“Oh I remember me dad dashing in. We were having tea. Me dad were in such a sweat. The police were after him. There was such a bother. He couldn’t really speak to us. He sat down to eat his tea and said, ‘let’s all be quiet’. He was so upset at what police had done to turn innocent people out of their homes.”

It must have been difficult to extract humour from the events at the time. In later life Arnold Hardy, an eyewitness, recalled the events with a friend. This friend, Fred Hollingsworth, remembers Arnold’s humorous recall:

“Well it was a regular joke whenever you was in the garden. He always used to say, ‘mind my nasturtiums’. With the unemployed being knocked about by the police and jumping over gardens and getting out of the way, an old dame was worried and shouted ‘mind my nasturtiums’ as they were scrambling about”.

AFTERMATH

In the early evening a sort of calm descended on Providence Road. People who had spent the day on Rivelin trails returned up the hill to pass by a litter of stones, bricks, iron bars, and discarded caps. Even today people can still recall the cobbles splashed with blood, a man with a bandaged head and the few remaining ‘cossacks’. At this moment Mrs Cundy returned to find the yard a shambles. The family’s few possessions, a bed, a picture, bundles of clothes, a box, were scattered and damaged on the cobbles. The pram was broken. Mrs Cundy gave an interview to a lingering reporter who took a photo of the children. She was quoted saying, ‘I don’t know where we shall sleep tonight. We won’t go to the workhouse.’

The following day the arrests started. Councillor Butcher was in court supporting the one unemployed protester arrested the day before. The police ushered Butcher out of the hearing of a miner named Grantham and arrested him on a charge of ‘riot’ or ‘incitement to riot’. The following day, Friday 9th June, the courthouse had to be cleared of protesting unemployed as Butcher and another participant, Thomas Hutchinson, were charged. Police had to hold back crowds outside and patrol the streets on this and subsequent hearing days.

During Friday night and Saturday morning unemployed leaders were rounded up by a squad of police touring the city by taxi. Among others, Alfred Haydock, Charles Barker, George Melia, William Riley, William Goodwin, and Lewis Newall were locked up in Central and Burgoyne Road police stations. Others, some still in hospital, were marked down for arrest in the immediate future. Saturday morning saw all the arrested paraded in court to hear charges of 'riot' brought against them.

The court reporter noted two bandaged heads. All were bailed till Monday with the various sums required being paid by Labour Party, Communist Party, and trade union activists. Alf Haydock's son, speaking in 1982, recalled that forty-seven people in their Heeley neighbourhood offered to put up their homes for his well respected father's bail. On Monday thirteen prisoners were in court. They were soon reduced to twelve as Lewis Newall's injuries led to him fainting and being carried out. The thirteen were:

Cnclr. A. Butcher (46 years) 76 Kirkstone Road – greengrocer
Cnclr. A. Smith (30) 6 ct 1 house, Blackmoor Street – unemployed
rigger
Alfred Haydock (37) 23 View Road, Heeley – unemployed engineer
George Melia (32) 3 ct 1 house, Burlington Street – unemployed
Charles Barker (36) 21 Ash Street – unemployed
William Riley (35) 3ct 7 house, Martin Street -unemployed
William Goodwin (27) 82 Carnarvon Street – unemployed
Frank Horsefield (26) 437 Langsett Road -unemployed
William Keyworth (63) 7 ct. 1 House, Langsett Road -unemployed
George Grantham (26) 187 Don Road – Unemployed miner
Thomas Hutchinson (25) Flora Street – unemployed
Thomas Catling (36) 9 Hicks Lane – unemployed
Lewis Newall (20) 12 Dinnington Road – unemployed

The hearings continued throughout the week with a stream of police witnesses passing through the court. A police cordon covered the building throughout the week. The following Monday the defence case was begun. The firm of Irwin Mitchell handled most cases but Albert Smith and Frank Horsefield represented themselves. The main line of Butcher's defence – the most extensively reported part of the hearings – was that his use of the word 'fight' meant 'fighting for a principle' and 'shaping opinion'. Significantly, Councillor Rowlinson, a Labour Group

colleague, testified that Butcher was ‘a constitutional Labour man not associated with extremists’. The defence case generally relied on accusations of police provocation and brutality but the moral principle behind the protest was not forgotten. Smith and Horsefield’s own defences echoed this and Smith protested that his prosecution was ‘political’. Defence pleas seemed to little avail. Twelve of the thirteen were ordered to appear at the assizes hearings set for late July in Leeds.

PROTESTS

Two days after the hearings ended a man who had been present and injured at Providence Road – John Williams Baker – died from injuries received. Some said he was hurt by the crush in the passage, others said it was a blow from a truncheon. A post-mortem was arranged. Word spread out of the Penistone Road neighbourhood where he had lived a quiet life. George Acaster recalls him: “We lived just below him in West Don Street near Philadelphia school. He lived in a cottage. There were two or three cottages between West Don Street and Gilpin Street. He wasn’t well known. He lived up beside Keyworth’s yard. A quiet sort of chap who kept himself to himself. He was just an ordinary man went to voice his opinion.”

A man who wasn’t ‘political’ became overnight a martyr and political symbol. Protests were being made meanwhile by official labour movement bodies. Questions had already been asked about police handling during a council debate on 14 June. Cnclr. Rowlinson raised the contentious issue of ‘imported’ police and their use in Sheffield. The June edition of the Trades Council’s paper, Sheffield Forward, covered the events. The Sheffield Federated Trades and Labour Council discussed the issues. The N.U.W.M. representative on the Trades Council – Frank Horsefield – brought a three point resolution to the June executive meeting. It was to be put before the full meeting set for 27th June. It stated:

1. That a strong protest be made to the authorities against sending persons out of the city when on remand.
- 2 That the Labour Group demand a public inquiry into the facts of the so-called ‘Walkley Riot’.
3. That failing an inquiry being held, the Trades and Labour Council, along with the unemployed, set up an inquiry.

The first point was answered when the executive called on the Trades Council secretary to write to the Chief Constable asking him to receive a deputation of Labour magistrates. It was agreed that as the matter was still being dealt with (sub judice) that the matter could not be publicly debated. A letter was however sent to the Home Secretary demanding an inquiry into the causes of the police action.

The S.F.T.C delegates discussed the proposals on 27th June. By then the secretary had received a reply from the Home Office saying the matter of an inquiry was for the local Watch Committee to decide. The Secretary also reported that he had written a letter to the Lord Chancellor criticising absurd and offensive comments made by magistrate Appleyard in his summing up on Cnclr. Butcher's case. Cnclr. Skelton then brought the delegates attention to the matter of Baker's death. A minute's silence was observed and a letter of sympathy was sent to the widow.

BAKER'S FUNERAL

The funeral of John Williams Baker on 29th June provided an opportunity for a mass demonstration of feeling. The largest political funeral seen in Sheffield since Chartist times began with an assembly of trade unionists, political activists, and unemployed in the vicinity of Baker's home at 183 Penistone Road. Fred Hollingsworth, in June 1922, a young moulder working at Osborn's foundry nearby, saw the gathering and recalls:

"I saw the procession assembling at the bottom of Gilpin Street and saw it move off. It was led by Tom Pickering, the unemployed padre. He was in his vestments...Never has there been in Sheffield a procession of any dignity to compare with what that boy was getting. It was completely in dignity with what it was about, although of course it was being used as a means of demonstrating the unemployed's problems."

Tommy Crooks, a left-wing activist then and still in the 1980s, was in the procession. He recalled in an interview:

"I should say there was a thousand to two thousand people there outside his home. The procession set off and most of them wore black rosettes which had been bought by Mr Fletcher, founder of Fletcher's bakery."

On an overcast summer's day up to 2000 set off at 1 p.m. As well as the black centred poppies that Tommy recalls, men wore black armbands, red rosettes, 'Soviet Stars', red roses and war medals. The medals underlined the feelings of the large numbers of ex-servicemen, some political activists and others not, all showing moral sympathy for war veteran John Baker. The hollow, empty echoes of the capitalist politicians promises of 'homes fit-for-heroes' for the victors of World War One must have boomed loud in their ears.

The procession was led off by a cross bearing the words 'in loving memory'. It was carried by members of the Attercliffe Unemployed organisation and according to one witness, by Tom Pickering. The Sheffield and District Unemployed contingent followed with a wreath of red roses and evergreens with the words 'with deepest sympathy, he died a martyr for liberty'. Prominent labour movement personalities were observed on the march – Councillors Butcher and Smith, Mrs Wilkinson (another Walkley Labour councillor and first chairperson of Sheffield Federated Trades Council), Councillor Byrne, Alfred Barton (veteran socialist), George Fletcher (another veteran and one of the founders of the new Communist Party), Ernie Brown (Communist Party's northern organiser), Ted Lismer (organising secretary of the Red International of Labour Unions), Ernest Stanley (secretary of Sheffield District N.U.W.M.) Jack Ryan (Attercliffe Unemployed leader), George Kaye, Frank Horsefield, Gibson and Alf Haydock (all Sheffield Unemployed leaders, mostly in the Communist Party). The procession wound its way slowly to the city centre via Shalesmoor, West Bar, and Castle Street and up City Road. People joined it all along the route so that as it arrived at the gates of City Road cemetery it was almost two miles along stretching back to numbers still arriving at the bottom of Duke Street.

The procession passed through the gates with the mourners lining the long pathways as a guard of honour. In all 5,000 people attended to hear Tom Pickering – well known at West Bar and the Bow Street unemployed meeting places – preach at the graveside. Little of his speech was reported in the press but one fragment was recorded for posterity by an account in a left-wing paper. Pickering cried aloud: "O God open thou lips so the grim gates of the God of Capitalism shall not prevail against us."

After the funeral there was a brief lull before the assize hearings. The charges were dropped against most of the men. However, Smith, Butch-

er, Barker, Haydock, Horsefield, and four others stood trial on charges of riot. Deals made by lawyers behind the scenes led to all but Smith, Butcher, and Barker being punished. The same evidence was gone over. Butcher's defence had again centred on interpretations of the word 'fight'. Ruling class justice prevailed, Butcher and Smith got one month's imprisonment, and Barker, two months.

POSTSCRIPT

Having served their time Butcher, Smith, and Barker returned to continue their role in the struggles of the labour movement. Albert Smith made a break with the Communist Party and joined the Labour Party where he served till his death in the 1960s. Arthur Butcher returned briefly to council work then got a job in the transport department. He remained active in trade union affairs, serving on the Trades Council as a Transport and General Workers Union delegate and executive member for two decades. Charles Barker returned to Labour Party activity in the 1920s. Alfred Haydock got back to work a few years later and continued the struggle against the system through the Communist Party and A.E.U.

Little has yet been discovered about the others in the centre of events. Almost as we finished this essay, the Holberry Society were lucky to meet, sixty years on, the little Cundy girl brought out on the mattress that day in June 1922. Today she is Mrs Brearley and lives in Foxhill. She told us of her family's later history, of their move to Douglas Terrace in Neepsend and that Albert Smith later helped her father find work. Bill Moore, a local historian of the labour movement and active in the Holberry Society, sent information that offers a final postscript. In reconstructing the story of the Providence Road we have recounted a story of defeat. We are left asking were there any lessons. Bill has discovered an account of another Sheffield eviction protest a year after the Walkley battle. A left-wing paper, Workers Weekly carried in June 1923 a report of an attempt to evict a man with three daughters and a crippled son. The man was on a three day week and with a rent increase from 6 shillings and sixpence to eight and six had built up debts. They lived in one of the 'huts' built in Tyler Street, Brightside, for munition workers in the First War. Tyler Street was an area of great hardship with three quarters of the 760 tenants on benefit or relief. The Communist Party group on the estate, with the help of the Provisional Unemployed Committee roused the tenants who forced the door of the 'hut' and

replaced tenants and furniture. An evening rally that followed condemned the agent and declared a rent strike. The agent wisely allowed the tenants to remain. Bill Moore notes, ‘ clearly something had been learned from the Walkley eviction.’

A Sheffield Volunteer in Spain 1936-37

by Winifred Albaya

To all those who knew him, it seemed that Joe Albaya had a double motive for deciding to enlist as an International Brigade volunteer in Spain during the Civil War which broke out in 1936. In addition to his deeply-held belief in the democratic way of life, his attachment to his family origins was a strong one. His father, Jose Albaya Verdud was a naval overseer attached to the Vickers shipyard at Barrow-in-Furness and had arrived here with his family from the Basque area of Spain not long before the First World War. Joe was born in Barrow in 1911, and shortly afterwards, his father was transferred to the Vickers works in Sheffield, where he brought his family to settle. As a young man, Joe followed political events in Spain closely, and was pleased with the outcome of the elections in February 1936, which had resulted in a Popular Front Government.

However, he shared the general public unease at the rapid growth of totalitarian movements across Europe, represented by the Fascists in Italy, in Germany by the Nazi Party, and in Spain by the Falange, whose leader was General Franco. Although Franco had been dispatched after the election to a minor appointment in the Canary Islands to be, as it was thought, out of harm's way, it is a matter of historical record that he and General Mola on the mainland of Spain were, in great secrecy, planning to take place when in their judgement, the time was appropriate. This occurred in Morocco on the 16-17 July 1936. The response of the government, announced on Madrid Radio, was that the rising was an ‘absurd plot’, engineered by army officers and that it would be quickly crushed. (Note: the ‘Army of Africa’, the Spanish Foreign Legion was stationed in Morocco.)

On a sunny Saturday morning during the last week of July, I was with a party including Joe, taking camping equipment by lorry to the North Yorkshire coast for a fortnight's holiday. We stopped for a mid-morning break, and as we returned to our lorry, the driver told us that he had heard that troops were on the move on both sides of Spain, and that the rebel armies were advancing on Madrid.

I think it dawned on us at that moment that a civil war, and not just a rebel rising was taking place in Spain. As we climbed with our packs on to the lorry, someone was struck by the resemblance seen on press photographs to similar lorries crowded with soldiers and equipment on the upland roads of Central Spain, like those on which we were travelling. Someone said, 'All aboard for Spain, comrades' and we laughed, not realising how closely the Spanish civil war was to involve some of us.

During the autumn of 1936, Joe listened nightly to broadcasts from Radio Madrid. In the home circle his family spoke Spanish, including Joe, so that he was able to appreciate the fiery and stirring speeches of Dolores Ibarruri, La Pasionaria, calling on workers, peasants, anti-fascist, and patriotic Spaniards to support the Republic; and concluding with the watchword 'No Pasaran', they shall not pass! At this time, Joe was working in the family shop, a sweets, tobacco, and home-made ice cream business, but at the beginning of December 1936, he had broken the news to his family that he intended to volunteer as a member of the International Brigade, which had been enrolling members for the past two months. They were aware by this time of his total commitment to the republican cause, and although very worried, were resigned to his decision.

The week before Christmas 1936, Joe came to my home to say goodbye. Most partings are sad, but this was unusually so, due to the combined elements of uncertainty and unknown dangers. The virtual blackout of his movements from then, until a link of communication was restored, made that period one of the darkest I can remember.

THE AID TO SPAIN COMMITTEE IN SHEFFIELD

On the outbreak of the Civil War, the British Government had considered what diplomatic position it was to adopt with regard to Spain, and by the first week in August it had accepted the idea of Non-Intervention in principle. In September, the Non-Intervention Committee met in

London, being comprised of the ambassadors of all the European countries except Switzerland, which already had a code of neutrality. Since the sale of all arms and military equipment to Spain was forbidden by the terms of an agreement reached by this Committee, the sympathetic French Trade Unions proposed that clothing, food, and medical supplies for Spain should be collected and sent.

This was the beginning of the 'Aid to Spain' movement, and very soon, committees were being formed all over Britain to organise humanitarian help for the democratically elected Popular Front Government of Spain. One notable supporter of the 'Aid to Spain' movement was Professor J B S Haldane, his wife Charlotte doing welfare work for the British Volunteers.

In May 1936, the publisher Victor Gollancz had started the Left Book Club with, as directors, Professor Harold Laski and John Strachey. It rapidly grew to about 50,000 members, many of whom began to form branch discussion groups all over Britain. The books, issued monthly, were a very influential source of propaganda against Fascism, and the readers could be described as constituting a broadly-based Popular Front Movement.

Sheffield had its own Left Book Club branch, formed in the summer of 1936, and this grew rapidly with the progress of the civil war in Spain. An 'Aid to Spain' committee was formed with a nucleus of Left Book Club members, but its range soon extended to cover people with strong political convictions and those activated by religious and humanitarian beliefs – in short, opposed to Fascism.

Some public meetings in support of 'Aid to Spain' were held during the winter of 1936-37, and it was during one of these meetings which was held at the Forester's Hall, Trippet Lane in February, that an urgent request was whispered to me to leave the hall. Outside in the corridor, I was given a phone number on a slip of paper. When I rang this number, an unfamiliar voice informed me that the British Battalion had been in action in Jarama, south-east of Madrid, that there had been many casualties, but no names received so far. (It should be stressed that great secrecy was essential at this time, since to volunteer for Spain was illegal in Non-Intervention countries which had passed laws in support of the N I Control Agreement.)

There followed, after this, a period of great anxiety for the family and me, whilst we waited for more positive news. It came at last about two weeks later

in the form of a letter bearing a Paris postmark. Inside the envelope was a small thin card on which the original letter, much reduced in size, had been photographed, a device which was to be used later by the Forces in the Second World War. The news it contained was brief, but very welcome.

Joe wrote that he was stationed at Albacete, and gave an address to which I could write. He said that he was now engaged in making long regular journeys, with others, by lorry (which he referred to as a 'camion') collecting provisions and other supplies, in the course of which his knowledge of the language came in very useful. The letter contained many enquiries about his family and friends and ended with warm and reassuring greetings to me. I was overjoyed to know that he was safe for the time being, and from that time a regular flow of communication was established. In later letters he described his journeys in more detail, with accounts of the landscape and people, air-raids on Madrid in which he was involved, a visit to a hospital to see an injured comrade, and friends he had made in the Battalion, particularly amongst a group of Irishmen. Sometimes the envelope contained propaganda postcards of various kinds with slogans saying 'defendamos Madrid' and other stirring phrases, and pictures of republican militia going into action. He gave no hint as to the movements and military actions in which the International Brigade had been involved, nor was I aware until months later of the importance of Albacete as a base of operations, and not a small village as I thought.

SHEFFIELD STREET COLLECTIONS

Early in 1937, the 'Aid for Spain' Committee in Sheffield decided that a Street Collecting Campaign should be put into operation as soon as the weather was favourable. Preparations were made with this in view, in the shape of posters, leaflets, badges and collecting tins. Mr Charles Darvill was approached and agreed to watch over and encourage the collections and campaigning. In addition, permission for the collections had to be obtained from the appropriate authorities. We knew there would be no shortage of willing helpers, and an essential requirement, the provision of a van, was supplied by a sympathiser who also offered his services as a driver. A plan was drawn up, dividing Sheffield into districts, and individuals were asked if they would volunteer to organise a collection in a particular area. I remember taking part in collections in Sharrow, Nether Edge, Highfield, Burngreave, Pitsmoor, and I was responsible for organising one in Darnall.

As I recall, the printed leaflets appealing for tins of food, and/or money, and giving the date, usually a couple of days later, when the collection would take place, were distributed throughout Darnall one evening in the early summer (although some collections took place at the week-ends). A lively group of people meeting at the junction of Main Road and Staniforth Road with collecting tins, boxes and a poster-covered van attracted interest and attention. Each street in turn was quickly covered by a team of helpers working on opposite sides and from the beginning, the response was heartening. People came to their front doors, or to the end of their street passages to watch us as our boxes filled with tins which we loaded into the van, and children running about the street gave us a send-off.

The van was driven to the Committee Room where the tins were sorted and the money counted. The premises were situated above a photographer's shop, called the John Bull Studios, at the corner of George Street and High Street in the city centre. The tins were then loaded on to a waiting barge on the Sheffield Canal and when the number of tins from subsequent collections had filled the barge to capacity it was ready to be sent to the Hull docks.

BRITISH MEDICAL AID TO SPAIN

British 'Aid to Spain' took another important form at this time with the creation of a British Medical Aid Group including doctors and nurses, a valuable necessity, since nearly all the doctors and nurses in Spain were with the rebels. The unit was in operation soon after the first volunteers arrived before it was followed in 1937 by two American Medical Aid Units, who besides doctors, nurses, and ambulance drivers, brought enough money to finance six hospitals (the British had five). The poet W H Auden served for a time as the stretcher bearer, and a Sheffield volunteer, Clem Becket, who had been a speedway rider, Captain of the Daredevils team, was killed driving an ambulance at this time. On 18th July, Julian Bell, nephew of Virginia Woolf, was killed when driving an ambulance for the British Medical Aid unit at Brunete.

RETURN TO BRITAIN

Early in 1937, Joe's father died, and the family asked me as soon as letters from Spain were getting through, to pass on the sad news, with the

hope that if at all possible, leave could be obtained, as family matters connected with the business needed attention. The months went by, but Joe was unable to tell us anything. Then one day, in the last week of July, I received a telegram from London with the news that he was on his way to Sheffield. The military requirements of a volunteer army were very stringent, and there had been no set term of enlistment as with the regular army. However, it appeared that Arthur Horner, the then President of the South Wales miners, was on a visit to Spain in July and managed to negotiate with the Brigade authorities that some leave should be granted to members of the Brigades. Whether this had any influence on Joe's repatriation to Britain on grounds of compassionate leave I do not know, but we were all overjoyed at the news.

On a warm July evening, I went with one of Joe's sisters to the Midlands Station to meet the London train. Word of his return had been passed round, and a group of friends were already assembled to welcome him. As he came down the platform towards us, I was glad to see how fit he looked, although attired in clothes of an unfamiliar style and material. He explained that he had not seen his own clothes after he had been given a uniform. The most significant item of his attire was, however, a scarlet scarf which was tucked up into his open necked shirt. Afterwards he removed the red silk square to show me the letters 'UHP' embroidered in one corner, one of the slogans which, together with 'Salud' and 'No Pasa-ran' were shouted by cheering crowds who lined the Barcelona streets when the first International Volunteers arrived in October 1936.

Joe soon adjusted himself to civilian life, and on the whole, spoke freely about his experiences in Spain. Yet I soon found that there were certain 'No-go' areas, chiefly concerning the Jarama battle and other matters, which I learned to respect and on which I never ventured to press him, and this reticence continued all his life. As time went on it became possible for me to piece together from talks, I had with Joe at various times, an account of his experiences during the seven months he spent in Spain.

He left Sheffield by the midnight train to London, where he was given a one-way ticket to France. In Paris, he and other volunteers were taken by train to Perpignan and by lorries over the Spanish frontier. At various places they were given a great welcome by the local people, and the hands of fellowship were stretched out to them. Finally, they reached Albacete, the base of the International Brigade, where they were identi-

fied and registered, and any volunteers who spoke Spanish were called for. Joe was attached to headquarters as one of the interpreters, helping to arrange billets, rations, maintaining contact with the Popular Front Committee and other general matters of organisation.

The 15th International Brigade to which the British Battalion was attached had been established in February 1937, the man chiefly responsible for its formation being Captain George Nathan, a regular army officer who had been attached to the Black and Tans in Ireland. In addition to the British Battalion there was also the Dimitrov Battalion (Yugoslav), the Abraham Lincoln Battalion (American) and a French battalion. Joe said that Captain Nathan was responsible for the training of the British Battalion on regular army lines and spoke of him warmly as a great leader – ‘We would have followed him anywhere’.

In an interview given to Radio Sheffield later, in 1964, Joe said that the British Battalion was a very mixed company, ranging from those with strong political convictions which covered the whole spectrum of opinion, to blue collar workers, teachers, writers, and long haired intellectuals. When he compared the discipline to that of the British Army in which he served during the Second World War, he said that although it was strict, it was a little less formal. They all accepted it because they were fighting for something in which they strongly believed. The chief drawbacks were the equipment was not modern, rifles were of an old design, and tanks were few. This meant that fighting, particularly on the Jarama front was not mobile, but of the trench warfare type, similar to the First World War. The trenches were well made, and could withstand all but mortars and bombs.

Earlier in his life, Joe had experience of handling a gun, when, as a teenager, he had accompanied his father, who rented a rough-shoot in Derbyshire.

In the Jarama battle, the British Battalion fought gallantly, with perhaps three quarters of the battalion never having held a loaded weapon in their hands before, and some complaining bitterly that their rifles jammed at the critical moment. Joe said of this battle, ‘I advanced when I was told to advance and retreated when I was told to retreat’. The battalion commander, Tom Wintringham was wounded, also a young writer, Christopher Caudwell (St. John Sprigg) whom Joe knew, was killed. In this battle, which commenced during the first week of February 1937 through to the 12th, there were only two hundred and twenty

five survivors out of the original six hundred of the British Battalion. The American Abraham Lincoln Battalion, mainly consisting of young students fought with great bravery, but also suffered many casualties afterwards. The survivors sang, to the tune of 'Red River Valley', these words, which Joe later would sadly recall:

'There's a valley in Spain called Jarama
It's a place that we all know too well,
For 'tis there that we wasted our manhood,
And most of our old age as well.'

AWAY FROM THE FRONT LINE AND HOME

Fighting continued in another action at Guadalajara to the east of Madrid until March, when the International Brigades were withdrawn from action for a time, and a period of relative calm began. Morale was kept up by the introduction of social activities such as boxing contests, and football matches arranged between the different 'international' sides, and it was almost possible to forget the war for a time. Classes were started for those who were interested, and Joe recalled a talk on Biology in which a 'thin man with a slight stammer' interrupted the discussion and in a quiet way corrected some rather wild and incorrect statements being made by a comrade. The quiet man was Professor J B S Haldane, the famous scientist, who had come to give advice to the Brigades on gas attacks and the proper handling of Mills grenades. Joe was acquainted with Haldane's sixteen-year-old stepson who had joined the British Battalion, and also the young secretary of the poet Stephen Spender, another volunteer. Spender himself came to headquarters on behalf of this young man, who had been trying to escape.

The writer Ernest Hemingway, now a reporter on the Republican side, was seen around the International Brigade base at this time, and was thought to be giving instructions on the use of rifles to young Spanish soldiers. Many years afterwards, when Marshal Tito became President of Yugoslavia, Joe told me he was the same person as the rather mysterious visitor to International Brigade Headquarters, at this time engaged in welfare work. Whose name was Josip Broz. Joe himself found friends in the British Battalion, the most congenial being a group of Irishmen under their leader Frank Ryan, who like Captain George Nathan, was brave and chivalrous. One person with whom Joe found himself at odds was

young Giles Romilly, nephew of Winston Churchill, and whose elder brother Esmond had been one of the first to volunteer.

During all this time Joe was kept fully occupied, regularly travelling miles over wide areas of the country getting supplies for the Brigades in which his knowledge of the language was a great help. He said he sometimes had to work nearly twenty-four hours of the day. On one of his free days, he, with others, went to the local hospital to visit a wounded friend. A teenage Spaniard dying of a stomach wound pleaded with them for water, and on being refused, howled obscenities at them. This incident, and the deaths of women and children he witnessed in air raids stayed in his memory long after he returned to Britain.

In later interviews with local newspapers, he was invariably asked what had prompted him to volunteer for Spain. In answer to a Radio Sheffield reporter in 1968 he said:

‘I was always a convinced Socialist and a left winger, and looking back, it was the high point of our endeavours to keep Franco at bay. Perhaps I was young and foolish to volunteer – I don’t know. Trying to be as objective as possible, the International Brigade did help in the defence of Madrid when it looked black. The Dimitrov Battalion, the American Lincoln and British Battalion at Jarama held back the Nationalists at the beginning of the war to give the Republican government forces time to recoup their full strength, and in doing so, saved Madrid. For myself, although my parents were Spanish, I never forgot I was an Englishman.’

The fight against Fascism in Spain ended in defeat. Recently, however, another chapter in this country’s history has been written. With a democratic government firmly established over the past few years, she has now entered the European Common Market, a guarantee that she is considered worthy to be a partner of the other western democracies. During the last fifty years in which the Spanish Civil War has receded into history, a line in the poem, ‘Spain 1937’ by W H Auden seems to me to express the purpose for which this war was fought. It goes: ‘What’s your proposal? To build the just city? I will’. And I feel that all those who went to Spain would have accepted this as the main principle of their struggle against Fascism.

FIGHTING THE DOLE CUTS 1930s and 1970s

by Bill Moore

When the Government tried to cut Social Security benefits in the 1930s, Sheffield made them think again. On February 6th 1935 a protest rally of 40,000 people gathered in Barkers Pool. That same night, a deputation led by the Lord Mayor travelled to London to meet government representatives and gained agreement for the proposed cuts to be withdrawn. Eventually, similar concessions were made in the remainder of the country, and the back of the dole cuts programme was effectively broken.

Today, in the 1970s, in Sheffield and elsewhere, claimants and workers are struggling against Social Security and other public expenditure cuts. This account of the Sheffield struggle in 1935 is by Bill Moore.

FEBRUARY 6th: ALL OUT

February 6th - all out! This was the clarion call for one of the biggest demonstrations that has ever taken place in Sheffield. It was the response of some fifty thousand unemployed to the 'National' Government's attempt to reduce their already minimal unemployment pay. In May 1934 a new Unemployment Act had been passed. Part I of the Act, which dealt with claimants on statutory benefit under the normal Unemployment Insurance, came into operation in July 1934. It made a number of small changes, but it embodied the restoration of the 10% cuts that had operated since 1931. It was mostly the 1934 Hunger March that had forced the Government into doing this. This part of the Act affected the 39,000 unemployed on the register in Sheffield.

It was Part II of the Act, due to come into operation on January 7th 1935 that was the reason for the massive demonstration on February

6th. This part dealt with all those who had exhausted their statutory benefit, as well as those able-bodied persons who were drawing Poor Law Relief. There were 51,000 of these in Sheffield.

Poor Law relief was administered in the 1920s by Boards of Guardians who were separately elected by ratepayers. From 1930 it was done by the Public Assistance Committee which has a Committee of the City Council, not separately elected. Relief could be given not only to those without any resources, but also to others (e.g. unemployed on statutory benefit) if their available resources were not enough. Therefore the two figures given here are concurrent. They were now to come under a new, entirely separate body: the **Unemployment Assistance Board**.

Although the precise details of the new scales of payment were not known until December 1934, the main principles of the Act showed that it would be a serious attack on those unemployment - the majority - who were not drawing statutory benefit. So already in the late summer an agitation against Part II began and by October was sweeping the country. This agitation was also linked with the demand for the grant of extra winter relief.

The agitation at first was directed at one particular feature of Part II that had already been announced: the plan for compulsory training of the unemployed applicants to the U.A.B. in special training centres. This meant that these claimants would be removed from their families and home towns, would live under semi-military conditions within a perimeter they must not cross, and perform a full week's work for their keep and 4 shillings pocket money...while their families existed on scales of payment regulated by the U.A.B.

Demonstrations took place week after week in every part of the country. So strong was the pressure of the agitation in Sheffield that in the first week of November 1934 the Public Assistance Committee granted two shillings per week extra winter relief to all applicants.

DISASTROUS REDUCTIONS

When the proposed new scales of payment under the new U.A.B. were published in December 1934, the whole country was stunned. The reductions were disastrous, especially for single persons living at home

with their parents, they were reduced by more than 50%. In addition these scales were the limit - it meant the end of all special concessions (like the recently won 2 shillings per week extra winter allowance) which strong branches of the National Unemployed Workers Movement like the Sheffield one had usually been able to extract. All this was due to come in less than a month from its final announcement.

Immediately the demand was formulated that any cuts must be made up by the P.A.C. In Sheffield there were demonstrations before Christmas at the Labour Exchanges and the relief stations. On Friday January 4th 1935, 2000 unemployed demonstrated in Barkers Pool and pledged to refuse to enter the "slave camps" or to accept the lower scales. Already over 2000 signatures had been collected against Part II.

On January 6th, Brightside Divisional Labour Party protested against the new scales, and on the 12th, the Women's Section of the N.U.W.M. reputedly the biggest in the country, made its protest.

On January 18th, there was a mass indignation meeting at the Cemetery Road Relief Station and a deputation of seven was elected to see the Labour representative Alderman Albert Smith, who said he was prepared to make up the scales to persons who would be worse off. He would get the P.A.C. to do it even if higher authority objected. The following week he had to eat his words, explaining that they couldn't do it since it was illegal, but they would try to find a way round it!

MEETINGS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

In the week ending January 20th there were mass meetings and demonstrations daily. Barkers Pool was crowded every day. There was a huge indoor meeting in the Trades Hall. At every relief station unemployed were being registered as opponents of the "slave camps." A deputation from the N.U.W.M. met the U.A.B. officer for the district and demanded extra winter allowance (cut off from January 7th). He agreed that a very good cause had been made out and promised, for what it was worth, to place the demand before the board.

The following week deputations continued from every relief station. Alderman Smith was again seen by the Cemetery Road unemployed. At Dar-nall, Councillor Tom Eaton said he was himself prepared to make up the

cuts, but he would have to consult Alderman Smith and Councillor Frank Womersley. At Matilda Lane, Councillor Mrs Broomhead promised to support any plan for restoring the cuts that the P.A.C. might devise.

At the meeting of the Trades and Labour Council on January 29th Cllr. Tom Eaton said that since January 7th he had been inundated in his office by people who had suffered cuts. "Amounts varying from 27 shillings down to 4 shillings a week which had been paid in the past, had been completely disallowed by the U.A.B. Sheffield had felt the operation of the new scales probably as hard as any other place in the country, and that was entirely due to the fact that the public assistance scales were high when compared with those in some other towns. As a consequence approximately 90% of the determinations that had been made in Sheffield were reductions.

That same evening at a Labour Party meeting in the Attercliffe Vestry Hall, Cecil Wilson and Alderman Fred Marshall were still trying to convince the unemployed that the P.A.C. "was debarred by law from supplementing allowances made by the U.A.B." When the audience jeered, "Marshall said the Labour Party could not entertain any suggestion that the law should be broken." Fortunately there were others who were not prepared to take that as the final word.

ESTABLISHING A UNITED FRONT

On January 20th, a conference organised by the Handsworth Ward Labour Party with the aim of establishing a United Front, similar to the national one that had helped to force the Government to restore the 1931 cuts six months before, had been attended by 76 delegates from 30 organisations, covering the Labour Party, the Communist Party, the Independent Labour Party, Co-op Guilds, and a number of trade unions. It carried unanimously a resolution to support the unemployed in preparing a mass demonstration to the City Council on February 6th.

The unemployed themselves of course had had a committee working for this demonstration since the previous November. It included such people as Len Youle, N.U.W.M. full time organiser with his assistant Jack Shaw, both members of the Labour Party, George Fletcher, Bill Joss, Herbert Howarth and Harry Blakey of the Communist Party, Stewart Friedenson of the I.L.P. who acted as secretary of the committee, and

Fred Hollingsworth of the Foundry Workers Union. Youle and the other members of the normal N.U.W.M. committee just wanted a protest and a deputation to the Council. The Communist Party members, who had been at loggerheads with them in the recent period, insisted that there must be the biggest possible demonstration to back up the deputation, and in the extended committee carried the point. Herbert Howarth proposed also that there should be only one slogan: **February 6th - All Out!**: everyone already knew all the things they wanted; the important thing was to get thousands out.

This was agreed, and 'councils' were set up in all parts of the city to begin organising contingents that would march from the suburbs into the city centre on February 6th. The slogan began to appear on walls everywhere. The Handsworth conference gave strong support to the unemployed organisation, which was now referred to as the Sheffield Workers' Unity Committee. The finishing touches were put to the preparations and on the night of February 5th, evading all the vigilance of the police, squads were out covering pavements and roads as well as walls with the slogan.

THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS MARCH IN

The next day exceeded all expectations. From all the city suburbs, from Hillsborough and Firth Park, from Attercliffe and Manor, from Heeley and Millhouses and Ecclesall, from Walkley and Upperthorpe, thousands upon thousands marched into the city - men and women, children walking and children in prams, whole families, young and old. They filled Barkers Pool and overflowed into Division Street, Cambridge Street, and down to Fargate.

The Committee had already written to the Council stating its intention of sending a deputation. Before the contingents had finished coming into Barkers Pool, George Fletcher had been allowed into the Council Chamber and Len Youle had had an interview with the Town Clerk, but all that the two of them got was the information that the whole question was one for government, not for the local authority, and in any case it was quite impossible to pay out any money that week. They came back to Barkers Pool, where the crowds were being kept together by a series of speakers - Harry Blakey, Herbert Howarth, and others. The committee members had a hurried consultation and then George Fletcher told the massed gathering that the deputation had got nothing from

the Council. "There was a great growl from the crowd," George then told them that it was proposed to send another deputation to insist on seeing the Council, and meantime there was to be a short march round the city centre, coming back to the Pool.

The deputation of five, including Len Youle, Fred Hollingsworth, and Stewart Friedenson, then went down to the Town Hall, passed unmolested through the thick cordon of police, entered the building, and got as far as the Council chamber. One of the Town Hall attendants took their message that they wanted to see Mr Asbury. At this point a senior police officer came bustling up, asking what they were doing there, obviously quite confounded by the fact that they had not been stopped outside. They told him they were waiting for an answer, and when the attendant returned to say that Mr Asbury would not meet them, the police officer said: "All right, you've got your answer. Now get out." With the help of a couple of constables he then hustled them out of the Town Hall, without however harming them.

POLICE BARRIER SWEPT ASIDE

Meantime up in the Pool, the remaining leaders had with some difficulty got the 30,000 to 40,000 people marching seven or eight abreast along Division Street. They went down Fitzwilliam Street to the bottom of the Moor, where they found the police had set up a barrier. They swept it aside and marched up the Moor. The intention had been to return to the Pool, and the leaders duly turned up Cambridge Street after the Moorhead - and found themselves alone. The masses had decided that they would go back to the Pool by way of Pinstone Street, past the Town Hall, thus giving the Council a display of their determination. The leaders had to run to get back into place, and so came to the Town Hall.

The foot police were massed across the road. Behind them were the mounted police. As the head of the demonstration came up the police ranks opened and let the first section through. Then they closed ranks and at a signal laid into the great crowd with their truncheons.

In the initial impact Timpson's shop window was pushed in. Wilson Peck's window went a little later. The unemployed refused to be dispersed. For well over an hour the battle raged in front of the Town Hall, with most of the Councillors standing on the balcony watching. The

men and women thought back with fists, boots, and banner poles, some women with umbrellas. Some attacked the police from St. Paul's graveyard (now called, though not in irony, the Peace Garden), using broken up grave stones as ammunition. Bill Joss swore he saw a policeman felled with a piece on which was carved 'In Loving memory' Perhaps he was the one mentioned in the Sheffield Independent report: "One policeman was hit by a piece of granite. Two policemen were bitten and a mounted policeman was almost knocked off his horse by a banner standard. Nine policemen were injured and about six other people." If you multiplied those six by a hundred or two it would not exaggerate the numbers who felt the weight of police truncheons.

Eventually the unemployed retired in good order to Barkers Pool, leaving twenty-two men and a woman who had been arrested and taken into the Town Hall. According to reliable witnesses they were there beaten up. Certainly they were a battered party in court the next morning.

GOVERNMENT CAVES IN

Late that night, a deputation from the City Council, led by the Lord Mayor, travelled down to London and the following morning saw the Minister of Labour and the Unemployment Assistance Board. The City Fathers were given permission to make up the cuts immediately and in fact the unemployed were paid out that Friday.

At once there was a cry from the rest of the country for similar treatment. Eventually they got it, but it was only the Sheffield unemployed who were paid the same week. The Government, suspended Part II, which only came in, much modified, in 1937. The unemployed arrested were finally fined £1 to £4 apart from three who were dismissed.

The Trades and Labour Council, the N.U.W.M., the Communist Party, the I.L.P. and many trade unions and co-ops demanded an inquiry into the actions of the police. No inquiry was granted, but shortly afterwards CHief Superintendant J.J. Peake, who had been in charge of the police on that day, quietly handed in his resignation and was seen no more. Thus ended an outstanding landmark in the history of the Sheffield labour movement. It was an object lesson in unity, organisation, and determination by people reduced to desperation.

A Community Of Women

by Sam Holmes

The street was rough. It got rougher as you went down and we lived in the bottom house. The doorstep to the Pie Shop has been worn away by many feet almost to the level of the pavement. The untrodden ends of the step were no more than three inches in height. Each successive doorstep down the street's gentle incline was higher than its neighbour and by the time the house at the bottom of the "entry" to the "Big Yard" was reached it had two steps, the lower one protruding onto the pavement. It was fortunate for passers-by that a gas lamp hung from a wall bracket above the entry and that in the daytime the step was exposed for all to see by its coating of "donkey-stone".

The occupant of that house was known to the kids as Mrs "Up-Two-Steps" but her real name was Nellie and like her namesake she had a hole in her frock, her sock and her shoe where the toe peeped through. Nellie's clothes were not worth the protection of an apron but like her friends and neighbours she always wore one, made of fine sack-cloth and as large as one would expect made from a discarded sack. These aprons had many uses. They could hold the 'taters' bought at the corner shop or from the hawker's barrow; it could conceal the item being taken to the 'pop shop' and conceal it when it was fetched out. A corner of the apron could be tossed over the shoulder to protect a child in arms. The apron could be spun around on its tape and sat on, on the cold sill of the attic or bedroom to clean those windows, for no window cleaner sought a living in the street. Nellie would sit, apron astern, on her upper doorstep and peel and chip 'taters' her apron had carried.

The apron had another and more important use - do you wear an apron? - and you? The division of labour is not so well-defined today when it's your turn for the pots. Cross your arms at the elbow and pinch the corners of your apron. Now fold your arms. You see, your bare arms are protected from the chill air you might meet in the street or the yard. Women would always stand like that. On their morning journeys across

the yard, thirty yards of it for some, to empty the overnight 'slops' in the outdoor and shared closets, or to dump yesterday's coal-fire ashes and other refuse in the open communal 'midden' they would stop on their way back and, arms wrapped inside their aprons, have a 'natter'. Here the rough and the respectable met and it was impossible to pretend. Here was the 'community of women'.

It was like that in the street. Two women meeting in the street would stop and chat and attract others. Such little groups were part of the daily street scene with its horse-drawn carts and drays, the buffer-girls red-scarved and clogged on their way to the pie-shop. Those pies were made in bowls you would expect to see in the kitchen sink. You could buy a portion, take your own plate. The buffer girls would buy a whole bowl or two and share it out in the 'jail wheel'. Kids would fetch the used bowls back and scrape the generous left-overs on their way. There was almost always some rag-and-bone man with his handcart or donkey-drawn dray - "Pot-mould for rags", "Donkey-stone for rags".

Pot-mould and donkey-stone may have had some industrial use or were the by-products of some industrial process. It was never bought; the Ragman had the monopoly and he wanted rags in exchange. Women adapted these things for their own use, for their steps and sills, to rub on the top edge of the stone sink and to rub on the stone hearth in front of the Yorkshire range. There was a belief that beetles lurking behind the range would not venture across a surface lighter in colour than their own skin. It wasn't true, maybe beetles are colour-blind, but the donkey-stone did tidy things up a bit and a donkey-stoned step was a sure welcome for any husband on pay-day if he was working. But let's follow Bill down the streets of his boyhood. Many of them are still there and it is a fact that today in 1980, when a rocket can be sent to the outermost planets or a nuclear missile could hit a closet seat in the Soviet Union, there are half a million houses in England with outdoor and shared closets, 9000 of them in Sheffield. In those streets we can see that generations of women have donkey-stoned their steps and sills. In a century and more of such applications the stuff has chipped, peeled, flaked, and shelled off, and what was left has been in these days sealed with Red Cardinal and gloss paint, which in its turn, in chemical reaction to all its forerunners also peeled and flaked. Beneath it all is a dressed stone step and sill and on terraced houses many yards of dressed stone plinth. The best features have been eroded by time and industrial grime and as Bill

says, women's fight against muck was a constant fight - hence the donkey stone. But not all steps were donkey-stoned for there was little purpose in stoning a step at which stood a pramful of someone's washing or one where children's means of locomotion was on all fours.

But we left the women in the street and their response to the ragman's cries were always "Take us as we are". Nellie was there, she had twice as many steps as anyone else and, obviously reluctant to go as she was, stooped, groped beneath her frock and slipped off - how fashions change - her "passion killers" and threw them at the Ragman who, tattered Galahad, caught and tucked them into his open-necked shirt. I have no idea what Nellie said to her laughing mates, I was only five, but I would have loved to report to Bill that she said, "Well, we've got to be respectable". Tom and Polly had come into the Street and Polly was in tears. They lived in Cumberland Street in a court-house, i.e a "back-to-back" in a yard, a house very similar and not so far away from the house that had been the Holberry home.

Polly wore a shawl, the only departure from the apron, which meant that she and Tom had been shopping among the barrows that stood at every street corner the length of the Moor, and so they had. As they told their story to the women they said their house had been entered and their goods seized in lieu of some debts. Polly was searching for immediate needs from friends and relatives. Tom had another purpose. At the bottom of the street was a Theatrical Agent's shop, its backyard came into the street. The shop hired out or sold costumes and fancy dress to visiting "Companies". The shop's owner was Harry Bewley, a man of the working class, a painter who had worked the theatres and music halls as a scene painter and who, with his wife Annie, had started on their own in this business. They were the friends of the local people. I know the following story so well because as a small boy I had licence to roam around in their shop and especially in Mary's kitchen. Mary was the Bewley's domestic and friend; she would bake me a bun with a penny in it. No silly, that's not what is meant by a "bun-penny".

In later years with the decline in the theatre and the advance of the cinema, Harry returned to his own trade and I "mated" him at one time at our mutual trade. So Tom was on his way to see Harry Bewley and there the plot was laid. The first thing was to find the date, time, and place where Tom and Polly's things would be auctioned.

On that day Tom in a fine suit, grey bowler hat, shirt and bow tie, spats, gloves and cane and all the confidence the outfit gave him, outbid everyone, mainly dealers, for his own things and a few extras. As each item was knocked down to Tom it was carted away by his mates, apparently his labourers, back to Cumberland Street. The reckoning had to come for there wasn't a penny piece in those fine clothes and Tom was arrested and spent the night in clink. But his goods were at home with Polly, and the doorstep would be protected by neighbours who had all been out at the time of the seizure. The 'law' has a wide experience of attempts to seize or repossess household goods and it was much easier to move on the Bailiffs than try to disperse an angry crowd. I saw many of these attempts as a boy, and the last attempt I saw was in Brightside in the thirties, an attempted eviction. The crowd was so great that nothing could get through.

Let me tell you a tale about class attitudes. A man out of work and in arrears with furniture repayments had all sorts of threats made against him. He received a final letter from the 'firm' that they would repossess their goods. There was an appeal from the firm: 'What will the neighbours think of their household goods being taken away?' The man replied: 'I have shown your letter to the neighbours and they all think it would be a dirty trick.'

When I was a boy much older people told me that when they were young 'crowd control' in an attempted eviction was carried out by men mounted on white horses. The men wore top hats and frock coats and I was told that this was the origin of the practice of rolling marbles under the horses' hooves. I feel that the tradition of the defence of someone's doorstep is as old as the emergent proletariat that first occupied the growing industrial towns and that in this folk-memory lies the origin of the picket line. If it is something as basic and fundamental as that, I'm sure the working class will smudge that nice clean donkey-stone at No 10.

But there were other tactics when men became unemployed or for some reason debts accumulate. There were many miles of 'cottage property' as it is called. They were owned by many landlords: some owned a street or half a street, one side of a street, and some owned just a few houses. There were always 'vacants' and 're-lets' and it was not so difficult to become the tenant of another landlord. The 'move' was always done by stealth, hence the term 'moonlight flit'. Where the moonlighter had gone no one knew, or would not tell. Winnie was born in the Scotland Street area; she doesn't know where, or any address where she lived as a child. She will

say: 'My life was one long moonlight night' and will add: 'You bloody varmint, don't you write anything about me.' Winnie is now 'respectable'. I have said elsewhere that there was no 'gas' or 'electric', just a coal fire in the Yorkshire range, a candle for the bedroom and no light at all for the attic where the kids were.

Then a man saw his wife 'beat' the fire and get the kettle on and a saucepan of water in the oven he knew what the whisperings on the doorstep were all about. She went to bed out of the way. It was going to be 'one of them nights', and he wondered: why do women pick night time. Sometimes there was a neighbour and he may have to go; at Betty's or at Mary, it was all the same. Well, who was it? It could have been Rose in bed and a paraffin lamp. She had been borrowed. Let's say it was Rose. The bedroom had a fire in the grate and two women sat in the bedroom. There was washing set in the bedroom. Downstairs Rose's husband sat on the hearth. There were three women sat in the bedroom and whispering like hell he was on nights. There's a fourteen year old daughter who had worked for Rose's family in Little George Street. She worked in the pie-shop. Her last few weeks had learned all the secrets of life in the street. In the street and the yard that stood doors open, women stood sympathetically at the doors wrapped inside their aprons, yes, that's right, arms. The man on the hearth was given his instructions: go and fetch the Doctor and bring him back with you. No one had even noticed him until then or even offered him a 'cuppa', but he might sneak a quick pint on his way. The fourteen year old was doing her rounds. No, she didn't know, it might be a false alarm but she would come back.

Then everybody was running up or shouting down or shouting up and down or running up and down, just like bedlam, and suddenly everything was quiet. The hearth man came in with the Doctor. The Doc goes upstairs, does those things that Doctors do, nods his approval of women's work and off he goes. Mary says to the man on the hearth 'You can go up now' and he is astonished that he is not given a ticket and charged fourpence. Queer folks, women. But it's all right. He has a look at his wife and new daughter and these laughing fiends of women put a poker in his hand. There is a small wrapped parcel on the fire and he is told to poke it. He doesn't know why, nor did I when I had that experience. That is the ritual, will someone please tell? In any case it has gone forever

How are you doing with that apron? Can you fold your arms in it? Easy? O.K. then - now cross your arms as before but have a pint bottle in each hand, barrels of bottles pointing inward. Pinch the corners of the apron and fold your arms. When you can do that successfully, concealing the bottles, you're ready for a casual walk to the (off-sales) and no one need ever know you're a toper.

Other Pamphlets by Principle 5:

1. *Sheffield and Socialism* by Edward Carpenter
2. *Co-operative Production* by Edward Carpenter
3. *The Future of Co-operation* by A. Honora Enfield
4. *Six Years of Labour Rule in Sheffield 1926-1932* by The Sheffield Labour Group
5. *Universal Basic Income* by Edward Carpenter
6. *Co-operators Socialists Radicals* by The Holberry Society
7. *The Battle of Walkley and other Working Class Impositions* by The Holberry Society

Principle FIVE **P5**



JOIN PRINCIPLE 5

An accessible co-operative learning
and information resource for all.

Lending Library

Co-operative archive and information resource

Talks, study groups, visits, and film screenings

Engagement with other co-operatives and libraries

Co-operative News available for Members

Principle 5 Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre
Aizlewood's Mill, Nursery Street, Sheffield, S3 8GG
Tel: 0114 282 3132 Web: <https://www.principle5.coop>

THE BATTLE OF WALKLEY AND OTHER WORKING CLASS IMPOSITIONS

Principle 5 Pamphlet: No 7

This second volume of highlights from the Holberry Society for the Study of Sheffield Labour History archives, *The Battle of Walkley and other Working Class Impositions* delivers just that - chronicles of instances when the working people of Sheffield took matters into their own hands and fought for justice for their class. Theirs were hard lives but ones they tried their upmost to live with dignity. From Samuel Holberry, the Chartist Martyr, to the marchers against unemployment, the Holberry Society members dedicated themselves to documenting the lives and struggles of everyday Sheffielders.

£5

Principle **P5**
FIVE