Live interview – In conversation

Mark
I'm delighted to welcome to the stage Dr. David Gordon Scott, criminologist, and Ollie Badger who is our alumni philanthropy manager, who will be discussing the massacre the world forgot the Chatterton massacre. Ollie and David over to you.

Ollie Badger [OB]
Thanks very much Mark and a warm welcome to Dr. David Scott. Some of you may have had a chance to speak to David during the lunch break but it's our job I think to keep it nice and punchy. Appreciate that the weather gods have been on our side. We've had some sunshine and then to come into a much more darkened auditorium. It might be sort of a little bit of a tricky transition.

It's been wonderful to see so many of you here in person, and to hear your stories of how the OU's changed your life like the affirmation in retirement that you can get that degree, or that it can support your career as somebody over here said.
So the next 20 minutes is ours. A bit of audience participation first just to see if anybody in the audience has studied an OU history module. Hands up.

There you go. Quite a few. Anybody excluding John down here because he's a Lancastrian. Anybody know about the Chatterton Massacre? So just one lady. Excellent. So everybody's going to learn something. This is why we are here. We are an education provider.

So straight off the bat then to David. What we would really like to know about the Chatterton Massacre. It happened in 1826. Tell us a bit about it, the uprising, Chatterton itself as a locality, as a community.

David Gordon Scott [DGS]
Yes well, first of all, thank you ever so much to The Open University for inviting me to come and speak and to meet you all and to cover this hidden part of British history. The very fact that only one person or two people in the room of a hundred, 1 or 2% have any sense of what happened almost exactly 200 years ago.

The Weaver's Uprising started 200 years ago on Friday this week and the massacre took place 200 years ago on Sunday this week.
What happened was that following a real severe economic crisis in 1825. There was mass starvation across the industrial north of England and this led to people to engage in protests because there was no other way for them to get their voice heard.
Between the 24th and 27th of April 1826, somewhere in the region of 10 to 15,000 people from Pennine Lancashire - which is the area just above Manchester now and encompassing areas like Burnley and Blackburn and Haslingden and so on and so forth. And in that area, they rose up to say we are starving. We need to have some kind of intervention here because nobody was listening. They were met, in terms of these anti-starvation protests across the four days, with the brutality of the local soldiers, yeomanry and constabulary. There was shootings on the first day of the rising which took place around Accrington and Blackburn, and there were people very seriously wounded and reports at the time that people had been shot dead.
During the research, we have not been able to uncover any evidence of that, but there certainly were people who were severely wounded on the first day of the rising.
On the second day of the rising they rose again, and they focused their attention on the destruction of the power looms. This was not the direct cause of their starvation, but the

power looms were exceptionally unpopular, and they were an obvious way of sending a symbolic message to those in positions of power.
On the second day, they rose and they went across from Darwen and Blackburn, which is largely where the protest had originated and where the organisers came from. And they made their way down over the moors towards Haslingden and Helmshore.

They were met by soldiers again, but this time they were too late. They had already accomplished their work in destroying the power looms. And although people were arrested, there was no major confrontation between the soldiers and the protesters at the mills.

On the third day, the 26th of April 1826, approximately 3,000 protesters set off from the small town of Haslingden, in the centre of Rossendale in Pennine Lancashire and made their way across the moors to Edenfield and then down to a very small village called Chatterton just on the edges of a place called Ramsbottom on the outskirts of Bury in Greater Manchester.

When they arrived, the 3,000 or so protesters were met by the military, the 60th Duke of York rifles and the dragoons, the soldiers and cavalry who between them they fired somewhere in the region of 600 bullets.

OB
May I just ask, David, were the protesters armed? Could you just bring to light that side? So, we've got the in context the armed forces and the military. We can tell obviously that they're armed. What about the protesters? Was it peaceful as far as they were concerned or did they take arms?

DGS
This was incredibly focused set of protests. They were doing this on behalf of the community. Some of them may have had a few pikes, but they certainly were very defensive. The only things they really had in their armaments were stones, small stones. And what they were coming up against was sabres, bullets, and bayonets. This is really important for when we think about the definition of what happened because actually, there was no equality of arms between the protesters and the soldiers. But when they arrived and the bullets were fired, we know that at least six people were shot dead.

These were **James Lord, John Ashworth, James Rothwell, Richard Lund, Mary Simpson,** and **James Waddicar.**
Four of the people were involved in the protests. The first four were involved in destroying the machines**.** The latter two, Mary Simpson was a 23-year-old woman from Haslingden who had missed her coach into Manchester and she was a bystander. and James Waddicar or Whatacre because we still don't know even the exact spelling of this person's name. It's not even clear from the inquest records which just shows how significant or insignificant these people were.
James Waddicar worked for one of the local mill owners and before he had gone to Chatterton, he'd been taking various different pieces, of wool and cotton from the machines at the Royton's Mill in Edenfield just up the bank from Chatterton. He was a dresser and he was working for the mill owners.
When he came down, he was going to see his friend Betty Upton. Now, Betty Upton had been widowed only two weeks earlier, and she was only actually 27. She was very young. And he was knocking on the door to try and get in her house, and he was shot dead by an unnamed soldier. The soldiers then ran up to Betty Upton's house, tried to break the door down, fired a bullet into the house, threatened to rape Betty, threatened and grabbed her sister by the neck. It was only her dad, John Platt, who was able to stop this from getting even worse. This is all in the inquest testimonies.

OB
May I just come in and ask another question? It's linking to what you're saying.
So as far as the reading that I've had of it, it's been described as a hidden massacre. So that's one of the questions. If you could bring that to life, but also how was it portrayed you know, in the national press, how was it portrayed, was it portrayed in the press?
What was the sort of response like and the documentation at the time of who were the aggressors?

DGS
This was a massive event in 1826. A massive event. It got in the *Annual Register* which is the annual review of the year. It was talked about at the highest level. There was meetings a couple of days after the rising of the prime minister, various different ministers involved, including Sir Robert Peele (Home Secretary) who was from the area.

The way it was presented to people was as a riot. Now that is significant for lots of different reasons because a riot implies that people are acting in ways which are riotous. They are acting in ways which are violent and chaotic. But as we've already identified, the protesters were very much focused on destroying the power looms to send a symbolic message. They were offered money. They refused. There was lots of accounts of where the protestors were offered silver (money) and they said, *"No, we're doing this because we're doing this to send a message to those in power."*
It wasn't about criminal activity. It was about raising a point. But the language at the time was very much associated with that of riot, which hid two things which are absolutely crucial here. First of all, it obscured that it was a protest. So, it denied the motivations and voice of the protesters by calling it a riot.

And secondly it obscured state violence because there's nothing in the word riot which indicates that at least six people were shot dead. And that language then helped to make this event both known but also unknown.

So, it was known that the machine breakers have been involved. It was known in the national and local press. There were hundreds of stories about it. This had been written about in very small sections in lots of different kinds of books and journal articles.
But it was also unknown, because it wasn't recognised like Peterloo was, from the 16th of August 1819 as a massacre.

Now there are three key elements to what a massacre is which are really important for us to think about.
First of all, three or more people must be shot dead in the same location. There were six people shot dead here.
Secondly, that they must be non-combatants. These were civilians.
And third, they must not present a danger or real threat to the people who are killing them.

And this brings us back to that point about the stones and the difference between having small stones and the difference between that and having bullets and finding hundreds of bullets using Baker rifles and having experienced soldiers who were involved with this. And those are the three definitions of a massacre. And this account meets all of those. But it was known for nearly 200 years as a riot.

So nobody looked into it. Nobody actually explored what happened, nobody went back to the inquest. Nobody went back to the legal depositions. Nobody read the eyewitness accounts of the people who had been there, like Betty Upton and John Platt and all the different people who were telling the story of the chaos and the violence of the soldiers.

OB
May I just come in there? Sorry, I know you're mid-flow, but you know, with Betty that you're describing. What was the response to the massacre?
Did it result in better workers' rights, like improved conditions for the local community around Chatterton and Ramsbottom, is there a happy ending, or how did it shift the narrative like people lost their lives.

DGS
The people lost their lives, and they showed enormous courage because they knew on the behalf of the people of Lancashire, they were standing up because children were dying in front of them.
We did a piece of research on this looking at the names of all the children who died in the year following the rising, and we found 1,649 children under the age of five died in Pennine, Lancashire in the year following the rising.

This was an anti- starvation protest. This was about the fact that people were living off porridge, or living off oatmeal and water three times a day and they had nothing.

This is an incredibly desperate situation. It's not quite at the same level as the Irish potato famine of the 1840s. But we're talking about a desperate sort of situation. What happened was there was a change in the corn laws because it was all about the food.

So, leave aside the kind of machine breaking because that was just simply a way of actually sending a message. This is all about people who didn't have enough to eat and imagine that there they are traveling up to 45 miles which is what this area covers in Pennine, Lancashire with virtually no food, and virtually no clothes and sometimes not even any shoes.
They were doing it on behalf of their community and that's where the real message is about - this community strength.

There was a change, later on in the year with the corn laws. So when we get towards the kind of the summer of 1826 - several months after the uprising and the massacre – we had a harvest failure and it was a very significant harvest failure because it was a harvest failure of oats in this country, and the stable food of people in this country when they had nothing else and were given oats as handouts in terms of food.

So, in September 1826, Huskinson, who was in charge of the corn laws, changed it to allow the people to get access to food.

OB
Great.

DGS
But the real message is that this was about people standing up and trying to defend their community, and to say this is about us not allowing our children to die of starvation.

OB
That's great that it had some difference, made a difference. People lost their lives, but the corn laws changed**.**

DGS
Well, the other thing Ollie, is we have got to remember that it's the story of this, which changes things. Working class struggle is never linear. It's one step forward, it's three steps back.
The history of working-class struggle in this country, whether it be Peterloo of 1819, whether it be any other protest, whether the Pentrich uprising, whether it be other protests that took place in the 1830s and 1840s, whether about the age of reform 1832, and so on and so forth.

It is about people doing something as a community and it is about us remembering it. And that's why it's so important and why when we had that hand up of nobody knowing this. The real difference these people make is the meanings that we attach to it.

And if we forget something, it has no meaning. By talking about this, by engaging with this story, by learning about it, we give those deaths meaning. By silencing them, by ignoring them, by forgetting them, we make it meaningless. So, everything that's about this project is actually about making these deaths meaningful in the present.

OB
And that's a great segue to my next question. So it's a two-prong one. Are you in touch with any of the descendants of the deceased? And if you are, doesn't matter if you're not.
Has there been formal recognition of the shift from it being identified as a riot, to as you say, a massacre?

DGS
Yes. So, we are doing our annual commemorations, which is the 200th anniversary on Sunday this week. We've identified two descendants.

One from Simeon Wright, who was actually a name I haven't mentioned because he was a protester who later died in custody. But we have a descendant of Simeon Wright who's going to speak on the 26th on Sunday.
We also have another descendant of Richard Lund who is not going to speak, but is going to be present. I'm going to speak and talk about Richard on their behalf.

We also have an unveiling on Saturday of a massacre stone. Now, 5 years ago nobody referred to this a massacre. All the local museums in Pennine, Lancashire call it a massacre. The BBC call it a massacre. The Guardian have called it a massacre. The local council call it a massacre. Academics call it a massacre. The change in language has been immense.
We have shifted the narrative.

OB
That's great.

DGS
People didn't call it an uprising either. But we have exhibitions all across Lancashire for the next 6 months, which are available on the different pamphlets and they all call it a massacre and an uprising.

OB
And now David, some of the themes that we've been talking about that have been like fairly heavy. Death, massacre, something maybe slightly like more light-hearted for the folks in the audience.
An introduction to your four-legged friend. Hopefully on the screen the tech is going to work. Here we go. Here is Flossy. Tell us a bit about Flossy's role in what you do.

DGS
Okay, so the reason I know about this. Because I'm a criminologist and I do have historical interests. I did study history up to masters' level, but I am largely focused on exposing state violence and looking at deaths and custody. This is what my research has been on the last 30 years.
But I got a rescue dog in 2020 called Flossy, who was 18 months old and she'd been very badly neglected. She had been caged. She couldn't walk because she had no muscle on her back legs. She hadn't been house trained. She was basically scared of everything.

So I had to find a place to take her that would be safe where I could let her go. And I lived just up the hill from Chatterton.
So I took her to Chatterton Peace Park to actually to let her run around and be safe and to have a bit of kind of strength built back into her legs.

Because she had no recall, obviously she's never had any kind of training. And it was when I was down there, I noticed the sign of the "Chatterton Riot" And I thought, I've never heard of this. What is this?
And the more I looked into it, the more I did The Open University research, the more we resulted in things like this, which is *The Open University Primary School Toolkit* - which has been funded by The Open University and is available now in every single school in Lancashire. And the person, or rather the character that presents the story is Flossy.

OB
Right.

DGS
So Flossy is in it, because it's meant for children. I always say that this can be read by adults because it is historically accurate and there are also books and as indicated there are educational pamphlets available outside. This is available to download for free.
I can't sell anything here because we haven't got the ability to do any merchandise, but there's are also tea towels and all sorts of things you can get in commemoration, but you can download this for free. But obviously the hard copies are, but this is part of The Open University work that we've done. But Flossy has been an absolutely kind of instrumental part of the story.

OB
Thank you, David. It's been like wonderful like your passion is infectious for this topic that hither to only one person had heard about. So, you know look out for stuff by email on comms. It's a big commemoration bicentenary this Sunday. So it's a very sort of topical time right now.

David's going to stay on the stage for the Q&A part in a little while. So, if there's any questions, kind of just keep them to mind for now. But a big round of applause for David and his work.

[applause]