

Peterloo

One act stage play

(Running time c. 66 mins)



Peterloo was one of England's great political events. A peaceful rally at St Petersfield, Manchester, on 16 August 1819 turned into a massacre after troops were ordered to attack a crowd of 60,000 men, women and children. Some 17 people died and over 600 were injured. This play tells the story of real and imaginary people caught up in the tumultuous events.

Cast: 17 main characters, plus testimonies. (Many parts can be doubled. The play can be staged with a minimum of four men and five women.)

Chairman of the Manchester Relief Committee – male, any age

Henry Hunt: Middle aged, intelligent. A fine orator and radical leader

Dr Healey: Supporter of Mr Hunt (any age)

Wright Smith: Supporter of Mr Hunt

Daniel Pritchard: Supporter of Mr Hunt. (20s) Young unemployed weaver.

Tom Farren: Unemployed weaver

Lizzie Farren: his wife

Elizabeth Neale: injured at Peterloo (any age)

Mr Tebbutt: middle class rent collector for Gilmore family

Mary Fildes: Intelligent, well-spoken, late 20s, leader of the Manchester Female Reform Society

Susannah Saxton: Secretary of the Manchester Female Reform Society (any age)

Catherine Gilmore: Intelligent, head strong daughter of landed gentry. Aged about 20.

Betty: Maid to the Gilmore household. Smart, working class girl. Aged about 20. Daniel's fiancée.

Edward Gilmore: Catherine's father. Magistrate and head of the Gilmore household. Owner of a farming estate and mill.

Charles Gilmore: Edward's young adult son. Arrogant, member of the part-time Manchester Yeomanry.

James Hamer: Cavalry friend of Charles.

Mrs Pritchard: Daniel's mother. Poor, down-trodden middle aged woman

Testimonies from: Magistrate (Edward Gilmore), Mary Fildes, Charles Gilmore, Edmund Dawson, Henry Hunt, Daniel, Ann Fildes, Catherine, Lizzie Farren, Special Constable, Infirmary Doctor.

STAGING NOTES

This play would benefit hugely from being staged with music written about the Peterloo Massacre, plus traditional Lancashire folk songs.

MUSIC:

The main album is called “Peterloo”, presented by Chris Hewitt and the late John Peel, featuring North West musicians. Most of the tracks referred to in red relate to this album.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Peterloo-Late-Chris-Hewitt-Presents/dp/B0044ERGFA>

Folk singer Geoff Higginbottom has also produced an album inspired by “Peterloo”. (GH)
<https://www.all-things-considered.org/product-page/peterloo-geoff-higginbottom-cd>

STAGING: The staging is fairly minimal and requires one table and three benches which are re-arranged for the different scenes.

Music Track 13: Peterloo

SCENE ONE: INT. MEETING OF THE MANCHESTER POOR RELIEF COMMITTEE. THE CHAIRMAN IS DISTRIBUTING MONEY TO PEOPLE INJURED AT THE PETERLOO MASSACRE. 1819.

THE CHAIRMAN IS SAT DOWN LEFT, OPPOSITE THE CROWDS OF INJURED PEOPLE WHO ARE STANDING OR SITTING ON BENCHES FACING HIM. EACH TESTIMONY IS DELIVERED NEXT TO THE CHAIRMAN’S TABLE, FACING THE AUDIENCE.

CHAIRMAN: [THE CROWD HECKLES DURING THE SPEECH AND DISTRIBUTION OF MONEY TO THE POOR.]
Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the third meeting of the Manchester Relief Committee. As you know, it’s our job to distribute money to the poor who were injured at St Peter’s Field on the 16th August 1819.

WOMAN 1: What’s it worth then – a sabre wound to the head?

WOMAN 2: Five broken ribs?

MAN 1: Every protest has its price.

CHAIRMAN: Members, you will recall, so far we’ve recorded 160 people who suffered sabre wounds bad enough to stop them working. 300 were beaten or trampled on by horses. 104 women were injured by sabres, bayonets or truncheons. Two of the wounded have regrettably since gone insane, including a woman who’s cut her own throat as a result of the trauma. Can we have some quiet from the public, please.

Thank you. First case.

DANIEL: (WITH CRUTCH) Daniel Pritchard, Ancoats, Manchester, Sir. I'm a weaver, with five brothers and sisters to support. I should be getting married next month. The cavalry had it in for us from the start, you could tell. Their horses were trampling over everyone. One of the Hussars kept slashing at my arm with his sabre and I was shot in the leg by a soldier. Look at me, Sir – doctors have had to amputate my arm and I'll be crippled for life. All I wanted to do was hear Henry Hunt speak – is that such a crime, eh?

CHAIRMAN: [BANGS GAVEL] £15 relief. Next case.

JOHN John Lancaster, from Oldham, Sir. I was cut on the head with a sabre. The soldier kept slicing and cutting into me. Honest, by rights I should be dead. But do you know what saved my life, Sir? A cheese sandwich. I didn't have any pockets so I carried me dinner in me hat. I was that lucky compared to some folk. [REMEMBERING HE IS TRYING TO GET MONEY] But I had a right rotten headache for a week.

CHAIRMAN: [GAVEL - NOT IMPRESSED] Case dismissed. Next.

SARAH: Mrs Sarah Howarth, with one child, from Broad Street, Manchester, Sir. I was confined to me bed for two months because of what them soldiers did to me. The crowd was pushing and shoving to get off the field and I lost me footing and then a soldier on horseback started attacking me like a maniac with his sabre. He was slashing and slicing into me. I was cut 20 times. Do you want to see Sir? I've still got the scars all over me body.

CHAIRMAN: No, no, that won't be necessary.

SARAH: I still can't walk properly. It was awful.

CHAIRMAN: [GAVEL] £1 relief. Next.

WRIGHT SMITH: Wright Smith, dyer from Stockport, a wife and seven children to support, Sir. I'm still not right. The constables beat me so hard with their truncheons I passed out and then the soldiers' horses trampled on me. Thank God for the man who carried me off the field to the infirmary or I'd have been a gonner. It'll be at least another month before I'm fit to work again, Sir.

CHAIRMAN: [GAVEL] £2 relief. Next.

ELIZABETH: Elizabeth Neale, from Deansgate, Manchester, Sir. We'd all gone to the rally. Lovely sunny day. We thought it would be a nice outing for the family. I never thought anything like this would happen. It was chaos. A soldier shot me in the back and when I fainted on the ground, the horses kicked me around like I was a rag doll and broke three of me

ribs. I had to spend a week in the Infirmary and it was two months before I could even get out of bed.

CHAIRMAN: [GAVEL] £3, 10 shillings relief. Next case.

MARY FILDES: Mary Fildes, I've five children and I live in Beswick Row, Manchester, Sir. I was the only woman on the speakers' platform with Mr Hunt. He was arrested so I jumped off the hustings and I tried to escape but the constables kept beating me. I had terrible cuts and bruises to my head and my body, Sir. It was like being a hunted dog. I couldn't go back home for a fortnight for fear they were going to throw me in prison.

CHAIRMAN: 40 shillings. Next.

MR HAYES: Mr Hayes, Rawlinson Buildings, Oxford Road, Manchester. My wife's dead, Sir, cos of the rally. She was three months pregnant with our seventh child but the soldiers didn't care who they trampled on. She was knocked to the ground and stamped on by a horse. Her toenails were ripped off and the flesh stripped from her foot. She never recovered from the shock, had fits almost every day after. She went into labour early, just before Christmas and [EMOTIONAL] died giving birth to our son.

CHAIRMAN: [GAVEL] £5 relief.

[EVERYONE LEAVES THE STAGE MUTTERING APART FROM LIZZIE FARREN WHO SINGS UNACCOMPANIED LANCASHIRE FOLK SONG.]

[TABLE MOVED TO CENTRE WITH BENCHES AROUND IT]

*Poverty poverty knock, the loom it is saying all day
Poverty poverty knock, gaffer's too skinny to pay
Poverty poverty knock, keepin' one eye on th clock
I know ah can guttle when ah hear me shuttle go poverty poverty knock.*

Up ev'ry morning at five,
It's a wonder that we keep alive.
Tired and yawning
On the cold mornin'

Sometimes a shuttle flies out
And gives some poor woman a clout.
There she lies bleedin',
But nobody's 'eedin';
Who's goin' to carry her out?

*Poverty poverty knock, the loom it is saying all day
Poverty poverty knock, gaffer's too skinny to pay
Poverty poverty knock, keepin' one eye on th clock
I know ah can guttle when ah hear me shuttle go poverty poverty knock.*

SCENE TWO: INT. A MEETING OF THE MANCHESTER REFORM SOCIETY, AUGUST 1819, A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE RALLY. HENRY HUNT, WRIGHT SMITH AND DR HEALEY ARE SEATED AROUND A TABLE. THE MURMUR OF AGITATED MALE VOICES.

DANIEL: [NARRATOR – ADDRESSES THE AUDIENCE AND THEN JOINS THE MEETING] We had high hopes for that rally. It was really summat, getting the great orator Henry Hunt to come and speak. A few days before the big event, everything was set and then the bloomin' magistrates intervened.

WRIGHT SMITH: It's outrageous - banning us from holding the rally, Mr Hunt.

HENRY HUNT: Our undoing was calling for an MP for Manchester, that's what put the wind up the magistrates. Organising a mock election.

Dr HEALEY: As if that was going to provoke mass treason!

SMITH: But to declare it illegal.

DANIEL: Can they do that, Dr Healey?

HEALEY: I'm afraid so, Daniel.

HUNT: It's done. So there's an end to it.

SMITH: So what do we do now?

DANIEL: All those grand ideas about organising the biggest political rally in England, ever. Honestly I 'm boiling. I could clobber them. Wipe the smug smiles off their bastard faces.

SMITH: Ay, the French had the right idea, didn't they, Daniel?

DANIEL: What? Get rid of the ruling bastards completely?

HUNT: That's dangerous talk.

SMITH: Well, why not?

HUNT: You know very well why not.

SMITH: [WITH PASSION] People are starving to death. The bread taxes are so high, people can't afford to eat. Thousands in Manchester have no work. What's going to happen to all these weavers, like Daniel here, who've been thrown onto the scrap heap? Hey? And the Government is completely blind to it.

DANIEL: Or if the toffs have noticed, they don't give a damn.

SMITH: You know what happened to Marie Antoinette?! A few heads on spikes down Deansgate would soon make them sit up and take notice.

HUNT: Smith, you'll get us locked up with your radical talk.

SMITH: Well, isn't it time to stop talking and take some action, Mr Hunt?

DANIEL: Change the constitution with revolution.

HEALEY: Daniel! No. No. You must stop this treason now.

HUNT: Listen to Dr Healey. Yes, of course we want every man to have the vote.

HEALEY: But we've got to change the law from *within*.

HUNT: From inside the system.

SMITH: You're just cowards, the pair of you. No better than the tyrants who are trying to silence us.

HEALEY: How dare you. [PAUSE] Look, Mr Hunt's only got a limited time with us up north before he's got to get back to Brighton. What if we arrange a new rally for next Monday?

DANIEL: But they'll just ban us again.

HEALEY: Not if we leave out the issue they objected to.

SMITH: What, you mean don't make a special call for a Manchester MP?

HEALEY: Exactly.

HUNT: Play by their rules and just have a rally to discuss the *general* question of suffrage - that could work.

HEALEY: I know the magistrates are petrified, with so many radicals in one place. They're terrified it's going to turn into the French Revolution.

SMITH: But you're going against everything we've worked for.

HEALEY: No, we're not. This should work.

SMITH: The system's rotten to the core. We've all agreed the taxes are unfair. And the only way to change it is to get men elected to parliament representing the WHOLE population, not just the gentry. You're dodging the only issue that's going to improve things.

HUNT: But it's not black and white.

SMITH: Yes, it is.

HUNT: No, if we've got to compromise a bit to get heard, then that's what we've got to do.

HEALEY: Play the magistrates' game. Put their minds at rest.

HUNT: Look, let's issue posters for a new rally on Monday. I can stay till then. And we'll make a public appeal – no sticks, no weapons. Everyone must be peaceful.

HEALEY: Hopefully then the magistrates won't feel so threatened and they'll let us address the crowds.

SMITH: Nah, you're dodging the issue. You've sold out.

HEALEY: Daniel, do you agree?

DANIEL: Alright, I'll go along with it. I suppose it's better than nothing.

HEALEY: Compromise *is* the best course. The authorities will have a lot of fire power up their sleeve. We don't want to give them any cause to use it.

HUNT: If the crowd doesn't create any problems, they can't possibly justify bringing in the troops, can they?

DANIEL: Aye, we'll see.

Music: GH, Track 5: Our Day will come.

SCENE THREE: EXT. A STREET IN A POOR DISTRICT OF MANCHESTER. [TABLE AND BENCHES ARE CLEARED TO THE RIGHT]

UNEMPLOYED WEAVERS, INCLUDING FARREN (LIZZIE FARREN'S HUSBAND), HECKLE PASSERS-BY. FARREN'S WIFE, LIZZIE, TRIES TO STOP THEM.

DANIEL (NARR) [ADDRESSING THE AUDIENCE] People were nervous. And some of my neighbours from Ancoats didn't help the cause or themselves. They just couldn't stop baiting the local gentry.

EDWARD GILMORE AND DAUGHTER CATHERINE ENTER BACK RIGHT.

TRY TO WALK ACROSS THE STAGE BUT GET STOPPED BY BEGGAR WOMAN.

BEGGAR WOMAN: [TO EDWARD] Please sir can you spare a penny?

EDWARD: [TO BEGGAR] Get out of my way woman. [STRIDES AWAY]

BEGGAR WOMAN: But you laid off me husband. We've nowt to eat. Please have a heart, Sir. [CATHERINE WALKS BACK AND GIVES HER SOME LOOSE CHANGE]

MR TEBBUTT, A WELL DRESSED RENT COLLECTOR, ENTERS DOWN LEFT AND WALKS PURPOSEFULLY, BUT NERVOUSLY, ACROSS THE STREET. BUMPS INTO HIS BOSS MR GILMORE.

EDWARD: Ah, Tebbutt, how much have you collected this week?

TEBBUTT: I'm doing my best, Sir. But it's not easy. A lot of the tenants have no money.

EDWARD: I want rent, not excuses – do I make myself plain, Tebbutt?

TEBBUTT: Yes Sir. [WALKS OVER TO TWO WOMEN HANGING ABOUT FAR RIGHT] Right, have you two got the rent, like you promised me? You have had enough second chances. You've got to pay – or you're out.

WOMAN 1: Please, sir. Just one more week.

TEBBUTT: No, this is the end of the line. Clear your things or I'll call the bailiffs.

WOMAN 1: Please, please we might have some money coming in next week. Don't do this to us. What about me 10 children, Sir?

TEBBUTT: Not my problem – get your stuff cleared now. We're not a charity, you know. No money – no cellar. Hard luck.

[WOMEN MOVE AWAY DEJECTED AND THEN JOIN IN TAUNTING OF TEBBUTT]

FARREN: Well, if it isn't Mr Tebbutt. Good afternoon to you, Mr Tebbutt.

MR TEBBUTT: [MUTTERS NERVOUSLY] Good afternoon, Farren.

FARREN: [IN A MOCK POSH ACCENT] Splendid to see you, Mr Tebbutt. How've you been keeping? [PAUSE] Sorry I can't quite hear you. [ONE OF HIS FRIENDS BLOCKS TEBBUTT'S PATH]

LIZZIE: Tom, be careful.

TEBBUTT: Farren, what are you doing? Let me pass.

FARREN: You're a bit out of your way, aren't you Mr Tebbutt. Come down to slum it with the unemployed layabouts. Hey?

TEBBUTT: [THEY CIRCLE HIM] I'm collecting rents for Mr Gilmore. Leave me alone. Let me go.

FARREN: Of course, we wouldn't be layabouts if you and Mr Gilmore hadn't stopped our weaving work, would we?

LIZZIE: Tom, stop this.

FARREN: [OVER HIS SHOULDER TO LIZZIE] Get back woman.

TEBBUTT: Look, you know we had no choice. I'm sorry.

FARREN: Easy to say.

TEBBUTT: You just can't compete with the factory power looms. It's nothing personal.

FARREN: Nothing personal, hey? It's personal when you get thrown out of your house because you can't pay the rent. It's personal when your family's starving because you can't afford to put bread on the table. My Lizzie here managed to get one bowl of gruel from the emergency kitchen yesterday and that's what we're living on this week. But not your fault eh?

TEBBUTT: Look, I'm sorry. There was nothing I could do.

FARREN: Ay, there never is, is there?

TEBBUTT: Honestly, I'm sorry. It wasn't my decision.

FARREN: [EYEING UP TEBBETT] That's a nice coat. That could keep me nice and warm in winter.

LIZZIE [INCREASINGLY DESPERATE] Tom, stop this. Come away.

TEBBUTT: Let me pass or I'll call the law.

FARREN: Oh, feel free to call away. [MOCKINGLY PUTS HIS HAND TO HIS EAR] Mm, can't hear anyone rushing to help. Can you? You know they're afraid to come down here just in case it turns unpleasant. Cos, I've got a few nasty neighbours, see.

TEBBUTT: Are you threatening me?

FARREN: Now 'threatening' is a strong word. I prefer 'negotiating'.

TEBBUTT: I demand you let me go.

FARREN: It's a bit warm today, why don't you take off your coat? [HIS FRIENDS START TO PULL THE COAT FROM TEBBUTT'S SHOULDERS]

TEBBUTT: [STRUGGLING] Get off. Stop it. I'll have you arrested. Leave me alone. [TEBBUTT IS ATTACKED AND HIS COAT IS PULLED OFF. I'll get you for this, Farren. HE EVENTUALLY MANAGES TO ESCAPE AND RUNS OFF. FARREN AND FRIENDS LAUGH. FARREN SWAGGERS AROUND WEARING THE COAT]

FARREN: What do you think? A lovely cut, this coat. What a gentleman, eh? [ALL CHEER AND APPLAUD]

Music: GH Track 5: Our day will come.

SCENE FOUR: INT. A MEETING OF THE MANCHESTER FEMALE REFORM SOCIETY, AUGUST 1819. [TABLE MOVED CENTRE SURROUNDED WITH BENCHES] ENTER MARY FILDES, SUSANNAH SAXTON, BETTY

CATHERINE (NARRATOR ADDRESSES THE AUDIENCE, WATCHES FROM THE WINGS AND THEN JOINS THE MEETING): It was *my* father who stopped their weaving work. They worked in his mill. I know he did it with a heavy heart and I suppose he had no choice but I feel so guilty. I don't want all these people suffering because of what my family did. Loyalty to class or conscience? All I know is I can't watch from the wings any longer. [WATCHES FROM THE SIDE]

MARY FILDES, BETTY, ELIZABETH AND SUSANNAH SAXTON ARE SEATED AROUND A TABLE SEWING BANNERS.

MARY FILDES: Ladies, have you seen the posters?

SUSANNAH: Oh I know. It's wonderful.

ELIZABETH: We thought that was the end of it, with the rally being banned.

MARY: Yes, Mr Hunt has been very clever and the meeting has been re-arranged for this Monday at one o'clock. [GENERAL APPLAUSE]

BETTY: Thank goodness. [SEWING A BANNER] I thought all this sewing might be for nothing.

SUSANNAH: [SEWING A BANNER] Oh, that's much better. It gives us a few more days to get the banners ready. [TO MARY] And you to sort out your family, Mrs Fildes. [TEASING] I don't know how you're fitting all this in with five children?

CATHERINE: [ENTERS MEETING] Oh, sorry I'm late. I've only just found out about the meeting. [SPOTTING BETTY] Betty, I didn't know you were going to be here.

BETTY: [SURPRISED] Miss Gilmore.

MARY: Ah, I see you know someone. Come in. [OFFERING HER HAND] Mary Fildes.

CATHERINE: Pleased to meet you, Mrs Fildes.

MARY: And Mrs Saxton, our secretary. Do take a seat.

CATHERINE: [SHAKING HANDS] Catherine Gilmore, hello.

ELIZABETH: So, what's the plan for Monday?

MARY: Well that's what we need to sort out today. At least we should put a on a good show now. [TO CATHERINE] We've only been going six weeks.

SUSANNAH: The other reform ladies will be dressed in white. I think we should too. It'll be quite a sight. Especially with the men in white top hats too. Hah, the gentry hate those top hats – they're like red rags to a bull.

CATHERINE: May I see what the banner says? [SUSANNAH HOLDS IT UP] [READING]'Annual Parliaments and Universal Suffrage'.

MARY: I'm going to try and present it to Mr Hunt on the platform.

CATHERINE: Does that mean votes for everyone?

SUSANNAH: Well, for men.

CATHERINE: What about women?

MARY: [LAUGHS] One step at a time.

CATHERINE: But I thought that's what women's reform unions were for?

MARY: Look, the situation is so bad, we set it up to help men get the vote. We're all working to the same goal.

CATHERINE: But I don't think that's fair. Women are just as intelligent. Why aren't we demanding votes for women too?

MARY: Actually I agree with you but we don't want to go provoking the men. Not at the moment.

SUSANNAH: Get votes for the men first, not just ones with property. Then they might think about us.

CATHERINE: We're always bottom of the pecking order, aren't we? I think we should all have a say – men and women.

MARY: Yes, of course you are right but....

CATHERINE: I just want to help make a difference. Like you. I know it's been hard for people all over the county. Take Betty, our maid, here - her family's had a terrible time.

SUSANNAH: Why what's happened?

CATHERINE: Betty, you tell them.

BETTY: My sister lost her husband in the war with Napoleon. She's been left on her own coping with three young lads. No pension. Three times she's been thrown out of one of those squalid cellars for not paying the rent.

CATHERINE: And your fiancé's not working either is he?

BETTY: No Miss. His family's hardly had any weaving to do the last two years. They're always struggling. And the bread tax – it's just a licence to rob poor folk. It's not fair.

SUSANNAH: [TO MARY] So how can we make the men in power see the suffering?

CATHERINE: Are you going to address the crowd?

MARY: I don't know.

ELIZABETH: You must try.

MARY: At the moment the plan is just to hand over the banner and a proclamation. We'll see what happens.

SUSANNAH: That would really stir it up – [AMUSED] that I'd love to see. Anyway, I'm eager to hear what Mr Hunt's got to say. Apparently he's good at whipping up a crowd.

BETTY: Yes, my brother's working down in Birmingham and he heard him. He said the way he talked about the unfairness of the Corn Laws and the taxes, and made this impassioned plea to give the vote to every man, Joseph said they'd have followed him to the ends of the earth.

SUSANNAH: Yes, I know my husband thinks the same. He's planning on being on the platform with him.

BETTY: Oh, I just hope that Monday is going to make a difference.

ELIZABETH: So do I.

MARY: Right, so are we all agreed? White dresses, meet at 11 and then process to the field with our wonderful banners.

CATHERINE: [LOOKING AT BETTY] Yes, we'll be there. It's going to be a marvellous day.

SUSANNAH: I just hope it helps to change things.

Music. Track 3. With Hunt we'll go.

SCENE FIVE: INT. AN INN NEAR MANCHESTER.

HENRY HUNT IS SAT ALONE AT A TABLE, WRITING A LETTER. MURMUR OF LOW VOICES.

INNKEEPER ENTERS:

INNKEEPER: [PUTTING DOWN A PLATE AND GLASS ON THE TABLE] Here's your dinner, Mr Hunt, Sir. Do you want me to despatch that letter for you?

HUNT: After dinner, thanks. It's not quite finished.

INNKEEPER: Of course, Sir. [EXIT]

HUNT: [SCRIBBLING AND THEN READING BACK. PACES AROUND THE ROOM] My darling, I'm sorry I shall be delayed a few days. Our first attempt to hold a rally at St Peter's Fields was frustratingly banned by the Manchester magistrates. They're like frightened rabbits, scurrying around, getting agitated at the least provocation. As always, we have had to compromise and it's now re-arranged for Monday. There's a great deal of opposition but I'm determined we shall have our day.

The radical unions here are well-organised and I'm treated with the utmost respect by their members! It makes a pleasant change from being cast as the rogue with you, my love.

I suppose it amuses me more than anything, when I think of all those priggish snobs in Brighton and their double standards. If the Prince Regent can set up home with Mrs Fitzherbert, why should people turn their noses up at us? It's a good job we don't take it seriously.

You don't mind too much, do you, my darling? Despite your constant protestations, I'm still concerned you put on a brave face for my benefit.

It's a different, darker world up here. The poverty is sickening to witness. I hope we can pull off a good show with the rally and light a fire under those complacent idiots running the country down in London. They cannot put their heads in the sand for much longer. I hope the days fly by until I'm with you again next week. My fondest love always, Henry.

[HUNT EXITS]

Music. Track 3. With Hunt we'll go.

SCENE SIX

[TABLE AND BENCHES MOVED DOWN RIGHT]

CATHERINE (ENTERS LEFT. NARRATOR ADDRESSES THE AUDIENCE)
I'm afraid bear baiting was rife on both sides of the political divide. And I hate to admit it but my brother Charles was one of the worst offenders.

EXT. CHARLES ENTERS RIGHT AND SITS AT A TABLE OUTSIDE AN INN DRINKING. HE WEARS A SWORD. MURMUR OF LOW VOICES. JAMES ENTERS LEFT AND JOINS HIM. INNKEEPER/WAITRESS ATTENDING

JAMES: Hello, Charles. Thought I'd find you here.

CHARLES: James. Sit down. Let me get you one. [CALLS FOR PASSING INNKEEPER/WAITRESS] Two more of these. [INNKEEPER EXITS]

JAMES: The sunshine's going to be bringing the crowds out tomorrow.[SPOTTING THE SWORD] What's this sword then? Who've you been tormenting this time?

CHARLES: [TEASINGLY] You're fretting like a woman now, aren't you, James? Come on, sit down. Could be thirsty work tomorrow. Who's lining up with us, do you know?

JAMES: Apparently, they've called in the regulars to help out. Horse artillery and the hussars, I think. [INNKEEPER DELIVERS TWO DRINKS AND EXITS] Thanks.

CHARLES: And the infantry too?

JAMES: Yes, plus all the local yeomanry. They're obviously expecting trouble.

CHARLES: Have you seen the radicals up on the moors, training with sticks? Like some sort of army?

JAMES: Surely not.

CHARLES: Well I've sharpened my sabre and any radical stepping out of line will get what for.

JAMES: [TUTS], Charles.

DANIEL [ENTERS, WEARING A WHITE TOP HAT]

CHARLES: Well, what have we here, James? It looks like we have a new young *gentleman*, dressed to kill, or is that be killed, in his new top hat? [TO DANIEL] What do you mean by wearing this hat?

DANIEL: I'm every bit as good as you, Sir [REMOVES HIS TOP HAT IN A MOCKING BOW]. And I'm out to display it to anyone who cares to look.

CHARLES: I don't think we can allow that, James, can we? [USES HIS SABRE TO TOSS DANIEL'S TOP HAT ONTO THE GROUND. CHARLES PICKS UP THE HAT]

DANIEL: I wouldn't do that.

CHARLES: I wouldn't do that, SIR.

DANIEL: I wouldn't do that, Sir.

CHARLES: Mind your manners.

DANIEL: Of course, manners maketh the man, eh? Never mind people are starving, as long as we doff our cap politely eh, Sir? I shall have my top hat back, thank you, Sir. ['SIR' SAID WITH MOCKING IRONY EACH TIME]

CHARLES: I don't think so, not so easily, not until you swear not to wear it.

DANIEL: [DANIEL TRIES TO RETRIEVE HIS HAT AND DANCES ROUND CHARLES TRYING TO GET IT] I shall wear what I like, thank you, Sir. I rather thought this attire suited me just as well as you.

JAMES: Oh, for pity's sake, give him his hat back, Charles. You're squashing flies again just for the sport of it. [DANIEL FINALLY RETRIEVES HIS HAT AND SWAGGERS OFF DEFIANTLY]

DANIEL: Hah, just call me 'Sir Daniel'!

CHARLES: Well, that's his card marked tomorrow.

Music. Track 10 Peterloo reprise.

SCENE SEVEN: THE GILMORE FAMILY DINING ROOM.

[TABLE IS MOVED CENTRE AND SURROUNDED BY BENCHES TO CREATE DINING TABLE]

SUNDAY DINNER, THE DAY BEFORE PETERLOO.
A TABLE IS BEING LAID FOR DINNER BY BETTY AND ANOTHER MAID WHO LEAVES. BETTY IS PUTTING THE FINISHING TOUCHES TO THE TABLE WITH CUTLERY, NAPKINS ETC.

CATHERINE (ENTERS. NARRATOR ADDRESSES THE AUDIENCE) The evening before the great rally, there was much talk at dinner. But of course, only the men were free to lay their cards on the table.

CATHERINE: Betty, we haven't had chance to speak since the meeting on Friday.

BETTY: No, Miss.

CATHERINE: I was surprised to see you. I didn't know you were involved with the reform society.

BETTY: Yes Miss. Since it started.

CATHERINE: Are you still thinking of going to the rally tomorrow?

BETTY: Yes, I am.

CATHERINE: You're not having second thoughts, are you?

BETTY: No, that's my plan, Miss.

CATHERINE: Shhh. I can hear Father coming now. Not a word about it over dinner. Our secret.

BETTY: Yes, Miss.

ENTER RIGHT HER FATHER, EDWARD, FOLLOWED BY CHARLES AND JAMES.

EDWARD: Do you know, the violence has got so bad, I've had to take on extra workers, just to patrol the mill at night. [SEEING CATHERINE] Catherine, there you are. Come and say hello to James. Your brother has brought him back for dinner.

JAMES: Miss Gilmore.

CATHERINE: Mr Hamer, you're very welcome.

EDWARD: Sit down everyone, I'm starving. What's it tonight, Betty?

BETTY: Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, Sir.

EDWARD: Capital. Do you like a good side of beef, James?

JAMES: It's my favourite, Sir.

EDWARD: Excellent. Mine too. [BETTY EXITS AND RETURNS WITH THE PLATES. DURING THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION, SERVES WINE, REPLENISHES GLASSES ETC]
Has Charles told you, we've lost five of our best heifers? Just disappeared from the herd into thin air. We brought the constables in but they haven't a clue where they've gone.

JAMES: What do you think's happened to them?

CHARLES: No doubt they're gracing the table of some undeserving poor at this very moment.

CATHERINE: Charles!

EDWARD: And did you see reports in the paper about those women raiding the potato carts on the way to market?

CATHERINE: Perhaps they were hungry, Father?

EDWARD: Nonsense. I don't know why but criminals are running amok all over the place. There's no excuse for it.

CHARLES: They ought to hang.

CATHERINE: No Charles.

JAMES: Did you hear about my cousin's mill at West Houghton, Sir? The mob set it on fire. Everything burnt to the ground. The foreman was lucky to get out alive.

EDWARD: Yes, Charles told me - a bad business. Did you catch the culprits?

JAMES: Yes, thank God. Three of them hanged for it. But one was only a young boy - can't have been more than 14. What's making them do it?

CHARLES: They're bent on a republic, that's what. Get rid of the ruling classes, steal our houses. Anarchy.

EDWARD: It does feel like we're under siege at the moment.

JAMES: The magistrates thought it was a copy of the Middleton incident.

CATHERINE: What was that?

CHARLES: Didn't you hear? Mob riot - about three thousand men. They attacked Burton's mill one night. The whole thing went up in flames.

JAMES: And then the crowd set fire to Mr Burton's house, while his wife and children were asleep upstairs.

CATHERINE: Good gracious – were they alright?

JAMES: Thankfully they all escaped – but only just.

CATHERINE: Oh, that's terrible.[PAUSE] But there must be a reason why so many people did that.

EDWARD: Discontent and harsh economics, I'm afraid. All the new power looms are putting the weavers in their little cellars out of business.

JAMES: Modern ways are throwing out the old. They're trapped in the middle. It's just unfortunate.

CHARLES: Pah, they're scheming criminals who want power for themselves. It's just like Jacobin France. Turn your back for a minute and they'll slit your throat and get rid of the monarchy.

CATHERINE: That's ridiculous.

CHARLES: Well, they'd better watch out tomorrow. Charles Gilmore will not be taking prisoners.

CATHERINE: Charles! Don't be such a bully.

CHARLES: The radicals have been training with sticks up on the moors. They're itching for a fight.

EDWARD: I just hope it's not going to turn into a pitched battle. I'm glad you both volunteered to be in the Yeomanry. And we'll have a big force of regulars there tomorrow too. I fear it's going to take more than a few bandy-legged constables to keep control.

CHARLES: And did you hear about the women? Apparently they're planning to fight with the men.

CATHERINE: I don't think they are.

CHARLES: Harlots and drunkards.

CATHERINE: [TRYING TO STAY CALM] They are not.

EDWARD: I'm just relieved you'll be nowhere near it all, Catherine. I have a bad feeling about the whole business. I'm meeting with the other magistrates in the morning. I just hope everyone shows some restraint.

EVERYONE LEAVES RIGHT APART FROM BETTY.

Music. Track 18: Mill Owner's Revenge.

SCENE EIGHT: INT. THE GILMORE HOUSE. BETTY IS CLEARING UP THE DINNER DISHES.

CATHERINE ENTERS

CATHERINE: Betty, did you hear the conversation at dinner?

BETTY: Yes, Miss

CATHERINE: Are you still intending to go tomorrow?

BETTY: I've already arranged to meet up with Daniel on the field. But I'm going to march in with the women's procession. I've got one of the white banners.

CATHERINE: Yes of course, you were making one, weren't you?

BETTY: They're relying on me to go.

CATHERINE: Yes. They're relying on all of us.

BETTY: It's not your battle, Miss, you know.

CATHERINE: Yes, it is - for anyone with a shred of compassion. How can we sit back and see this suffering without wanting to do something? Let's meet in the morning after breakfast by the back door and then we can creep away together without anyone noticing.

BETTY: Yes, Miss.

EDWARD BURSTS IN

EDWARD: Creep away?! What on earth are you two plotting?

CATHERINE: Nothing, Father.

EDWARD: It didn't sound like nothing to me. Catherine, tell me you're not planning to go to the rally tomorrow.

CATHERINE: Sorry, Father.

EDWARD: And Betty, I would have thought better of you.

BETTY: Yes, Sir.

EDWARD: Right. What are you up to?

CATHERINE: I didn't want to tell you because I thought you would try and stop me.

EDWARD: And you would be absolutely right. So come on, what are you plotting?

CATHERINE: [AFTER DEEP BREATH] I'm going to march with the Manchester Women's Reform Union tomorrow.

EDWARD: You're going to do what? I don't think so. And Betty, are you involved in this ridiculous little plan too?

BETTY: It's my day off, Sir. I didn't think you'd mind.

EDWARD: The pair of you want some sense knocking into your foolish heads. It's quite likely there'll be trouble at this rally tomorrow. Catherine, were you not at dinner? Were you not listening?

CATHERINE: I don't care. We have a duty to help. People are starving. We've got to do something.

EDWARD: And do you think going to a rally is going to magically conjure up a solution to feed everyone?

CATHERINE: No, of course not.

EDWARD: So why put yourself at risk? It'll make no difference whether you're there or not.

CATHERINE: I don't care. If everyone stayed at home, nothing would change would it?

EDWARD: I'm not going to listen to any more of this insanity. You will go to your room now, young lady, and you will remain there for the whole of tomorrow.

CATHERINE: That is so unfair, Father.

EDWARD: I don't care. I will not have a daughter of mine parading round with a load of radicals as if she were no better than a street woman.

CATHERINE: But you and Charles are going. I just want to hear Henry Hunt.

EDWARD: Don't be ridiculous, Catherine. He's a complete scoundrel and deserves to be permanently gagged and locked up. He and his crony agitators are coming to incite trouble, plain and simple.

CATHERINE: No, no, you're so wrong. They've promised it will be peaceful.

EDWARD: It takes one tiny spark to light the touch paper. You're being ridiculous and thoughtless, Catherine. I absolutely forbid you to attend the rally tomorrow. Do I make myself clear?

CATHERINE: But Father.

EDWARD: You will do as you are told.

CATHERINE: Yes father.

EDWARD: Now go to your room. [CATHERINE STANDS AROUND RELUCTANTLY.] What are you waiting for? Go – and stay there. CATHERINE EXITS] Betty, I thought better of you. Be under no illusion, I will not tolerate revolutionaries in this house. If you go tomorrow, you're looking for another job.

BETTY: Yes, Sir.

EDWARD: Now let's hear no more about it.

EDWARD EXITS RIGHT.

BETTY FINISHES CLEARING THE TABLE AND EXITS LEFT.

Music. Track 16 Mother's Lament

SCENE NINE: INT. DANIEL'S HOUSE – A DAMP, BADLY FURNISHED CELLAR. TABLE AND BENCHES ARE MOVED DOWN RIGHT.

DANIEL IS SEATED, BENT OVER TRYING TO MEND A CHAIR LEG. HIS MOTHER ENTERS RIGHT. SHE PACES THE ROOM TRYING TO PACIFY A CRYING BABY BOY IN HER ARMS.

MOTHER: We can't go on like this, you know, Daniel?

DANIEL: I know, Mam.

MOTHER: I don't know what else I can do.

DANIEL: I know.

MOTHER: We were down to our last farthing in the pot and I see that's gone now. No doubt your father's drinking it away in the Nag's Head.

DANIEL: Do you want me to go and get him?

MOTHER: No, what good would it do? He'll only come back and start a row. He'll have spent it now anyway. I know he's depressed about getting

no work but how am I meant to feed you? Answer me that? Are all you children going to eat fresh air?

DANIEL: I've been trying to get a job, honest.

MOTHER: What about the Gilmore place?

DANIEL: I went there *and* all the other ten factories again last week but there's nothing. Skill counts for nowt. They've got 50 people going for every job. Everyone's desperate. John's taken to stealing, you know.

MOTHER: Oh no – stupid boy. Don't you ever go down that route, do you hear me.

DANIEL: No, I won't, I promise, but you can see why they're driven to it.

MOTHER: It's just so unfair. Perhaps tomorrow will make a difference. People have high hopes of this Mr Hunt, don't they? But I don't suppose a lot of talking is going to put food on the table.

DANIEL: No, we can change things. We've got to.

MOTHER: Well, for the sake of your baby brother, I hope you're right. [EXITS TO SIDE ROOM, RIGHT]

[BETTY BURSTS IN FROM LEFT]

DANIEL: Betty, where did you come from?

BETTY: Quick, I can't stay long.

DANIEL: Why, what's happened?

BETTY: I need to warn you.

DANIEL: What's the matter?

BETTY: I heard the master talking over dinner and there's going to be a lot of soldiers at the rally.

DANIEL: Well, we were expecting a few extra constables to make sure everyone keeps the peace. It'll be fine, don't fret yourself.

BETTY: He's banned me from going.

DANIEL: Who has?

BETTY: The master. Says he won't put up with revolutionaries in his house.

DANIEL: [SCOFFING] You're hardly going to cut off his head, are you?

BETTY: He says I'll lose my job if I go.

DANIEL: That's ridiculous.

BETTY: That's what he's said.

DANIEL: Well you can't go then, can you, it's not worth the risk.

BETTY: Of course, it's worth the risk.

DANIEL: We're due to get married in three months and you're the only one with wages coming in.

BETTY: You'll get a job soon.

DANIEL: What sort of dream land are you living in? There's no weaving work, anywhere.

BETTY: So what future do we face, if you're never going to be able to support me? How are we going to have a family?

DANIEL: I don't know but that's what we're fighting for, isn't it?

BETTY: Well, I want to fight too.

DANIEL: But then we'll both end up on the streets.

BETTY: I'm going to take the risk. I'll meet you where we agreed tomorrow. I love you. [KISSES HIM QUICKLY AND THEN DASHES OUT OF THE ROOM. EXIT LEFT]

DANIEL: Betty, come back. This is madness. DANIEL EXITS RIGHT

Music. Track 12: Meeting at Peterloo

SCENE TEN: EXT. THE MORNING OF THE RALLY. BRIGHT SUNNY DAY. TABLE IS MOVED CENTRE TO FORM A HUSTINGS PLATFORM. SURROUNDED BY BENCHES TO PROVIDE STEPS TO PLATFORM. THE WOMEN'S REFORM UNION AND OTHERS ARE MARCHING IN PROCESSION ON A ROAD INTO MANCHESTER. THEY CARRY BANNERS AND FLAGS. EXTRA CROWD JOINS IN STAGES. ALL ARE MARCHING ON THE SPOT WITH ENTHUSIASM AND WAVING AND CHEERING.

SUSANNAH SAXTON IS CARRYING A BANNER AND MARY IS BEARING A WHITE FLAG. BOTH ARE DRESSED IN WHITE. [SOUNDS OF BANDS AND LOTS OF CROWD NOISE]. OTHER MARCHERS JOIN THEM DURING THE CONVERSATION.

SUSANNAH: I didn't think so many folk would turn out. It's marvellous.

MARY: They seem to be marching into Manchester from every direction. All the reform societies for miles around have sent people. [THEY SPOT PEOPLE THEY KNOW, SHOUT AND WAVE] Bolton, Stockport, Failsworth.

SUSANNAH: I know - it's incredible, Mrs Fildes.

MARY: Do you know, I even bumped into a group from Stoke earlier.

SUSANNAH: Gosh, that's a long way to come.

MARY: Everyone's in high spirits. It's so wonderful to see. We've got to make a difference, don't you think? The people in London will have to notice us now. They can't keep their heads in the sand with all this support, can they?

SUSANNAH: Oh, I hope you're right. [THEY SPOT MORE PEOPLE AND WAVE AGAIN]

MARY: Where's your husband?

SUSANNAH: With the platform party. Clinging like a limpet to Mr Hunt in case they get separated.

MARY: Yes, it's going to be rather a tussle, I think.

SUSANNAH: I think he's worried, although he won't admit it. Concerned people might get hurt. He didn't want me to come really.

CATHERINE AND BETTY BURST IN, OUT OF BREATH. ENTER TOP RIGHT

CATHERINE: Thank goodness we've found you. We've been searching everywhere.

SUSANNAH: Are you alright?

CATHERINE: We'll be fine when we catch our breath. [BOTH JOIN THE MARCHING] It's been a bit difficult getting away.

MARY: Why, what happened?

CATHERINE: Father found out we were planning to come and he locked me in my room.

SUSANNAH: Locked you in?

CATHERINE: Yes, he obviously didn't trust me. And Betty's been threatened she'll lose her job and still she's come.

MARY: Good heavens. What heroines!

SUSANNAH: Are you alright?

BETTY: I don't know. I don't like to think about tomorrow.

MARY: So how did you escape?

CATHERINE: Through the window.

SUSANNAH: [IMPRESSED] Well, we'd better make the most of today.

CATHERINE: You are absolutely right.

BETTY: We're marching to change the world.

ALL: [LAUGHING AND SHOUTING. PUNCHING THE AIR] Marching to change the world. [CHEERING]

SCENE ELEVEN. EXT. ST PETERS FIELD, MANCHESTER.

TABLE AS THE HUSTINGS PLATFORM AND CROWDS OF PEOPLE ARE NOISILY MILLING AROUND WAITING FOR HENRY HUNT.

STAGE DIRECTIONS FOR THE MASSACRE SCENE:

MONOLOGUE TESTIMONIES SHOULD BE DELIVERED IN A SPOTLIGHT. THERE SHOULD BE A POOL OF LIGHT OVER THE HUSTINGS PLATFORM AND SPOTLIGHTS FRONT OF STAGE RIGHT, CENTRE AND LEFT.

ABSOLUTE QUIET DURING THE TESTIMONIES. ANY ACTOR NOT INVOLVED IN THE TESTIMONY SHOULD FREEZE IN AN ACTIVE POSE.

INTERLUDES: THERE SHOULD BE LOTS OF NOISE AT THE BEGINNING AND IN BETWEEN MONOLOGUES - SOUND OF HORSES, SCREAMING, SHOUTING, PANIC. EACH ACTIVE MASSACRE INTERLUDE SHOULD LAST ABOUT 5- 7 COUNTS. MOVEMENT ON STAGE SHOULD BE IN SLOW MOTION.

HUNT ENTERS AND MOUNTS THE PLATFORM – GREETED BY CROWDS CHEERING. LOTS OF NOISE. CHARLES AND JAMES IN CAVALRY COSTUME STAND AT THE EDGE OF THE STAGE, LEFT AND RIGHT, SABRES POISED.

TESTIMONIES

EDWARD: [DOWN LEFT] It's a heavy burden being a magistrate in Manchester. We *must* keep the peace today. I didn't sleep last night. Not slept for a week. Is this to be the turning point that pushes England down the road to anarchy - to the fall of the monarchy? Not on my watch. I will not go

MARY: [CARRYING BANNER] [BELOW RIGHT OF HUSTINGS PLATFORM] We worked so hard to get these banners ready for the

rally. We desperately wanted to make a good show. I march down with the Middleton procession, with all the women. They look a picture in their white dresses - so pure, like they're going to a mass wedding. The gentry have been saying some awful things about us, calling us harlots and sluts, and accusing us of being bad mothers and abandoning our families, but what do we care.

And then a real stroke of luck - I spot Henry Hunt's carriage going past us. [SHOUTING OUT] Mr Hunt, Mr Hunt – can I join you? I want to present you with a banner on the platform. Give you the women's support.

HUNT [SHOUTS] Stop the carriage. Here climb aboard, Mrs...?

MARY Fildes. Mary Fildes, Sir. Oh, thank you. [CLIMBS ONTO THE HUSTINGS PLATFORM WITH HUNT, CARRYING BANNER]

HUNT The crowd parts like the Red Sea as we come onto the field. The sun is baking hot.

MARY [STANDING WITH HUNT ON THE PLATFORM] You can feel the heat and tension rising up from the crush of people - the smell of sweat and fear.

HUNT There must be at least 50 or 60 thousand all pressing towards the platform to get a better view.

MARY I feel so proud to be the only woman standing here amongst all these gentlemen. I have my banner and my proclamation ready to present to Mr Hunt - and that is the moment the world turns on its head.

EDWARD [DOWN LEFT SHOUTING] We've read the Riot Act. Arrest the platform party! Clear the crowd. Stop the leaders.
[MUTTERING] Don't let their poison stir these people to treason.

MARY: [NARR] Out of the corner of my eye, I see the flash of sabres glint in the sunlight.

INTERLUDE 1

CHARLES GILMORE: [SOUND OF CHARGING HORSES, SHOUTING SOLDIERS, SCREAMING CROWDS]

[WITH RAISED SWORD FRONT CENTRE SPOTLIGHT] We charge onto the field. All the pent up frustration of waiting, the arrogance of the lower orders wearing top hats, the harlots in white – we can hardly wait to get stuck in. 'Clear the crowd' - that is the magistrate's instruction. Who can blame us if we ride in with a little too much relish? The women are shrieking and screaming. [SHOUTING] 'Cut them down, cut them down' – [NARRATING, EXCITEDLY] all the Yeomanry are yelling. These peasants are like lambs to the slaughter.

[MOVES TOWARDS PLATFORM TO ARREST HUNT] We wade slowly through the treacle of bodies to make our arrests of the platform party. That scoundrel Hunt is our main target but who is the woman in white? Oh, we take great delight in slashing her. How dare she? How dare she? Blood is flowing from her stomach. Her dress catches on a nail.

MARY: [BEING PULLED FROM THE PLATFORM] My life is hanging by a thread. I feel faint. My poor children will be left orphaned –abandoned, with no mother to care for them. The screams, the heat, the world is spinning – spinning out of control.

INTERLUDE 2

EDMUND DAWSON: [CARRYING A CAP OF LIBERTY]

[FRONT RIGHT SPOTLIGHT] I am determined they will not seize the Saddleworth cap of liberty. The Hussars have it in for us. I can see the hatred in their eyes. [SHOUTING TO CAVALRY] You have robbed us of our homes, our work, our food – you will not take this cap from us. Kill me, strike my brother - but you shall not have it. We will defend this symbol of our struggle to the death. [CHARLES GRABS HIS CAP OF LIBERTY ON A POLE, THROWS IT TO THE GROUND AND PLUNGES SABRE INTO HIS BACK. DAWSON CRIES OUT IN PAIN AND COLLAPSES ON THE GROUND.] aahh.

HUNT: [BEING DRAGGED FROM THE PLATFORM BY JAMES AND CHARLES]

[NARR]My God, they've killed both brothers. Their lives snuffed out for a piece of cloth. My speech is in my pocket but they drag me from the platform before I can utter a sound to the waiting crowds. Man-handled by idiots. [SHOUTING] Get off me. For God's sake, stop this slaughter. [NARR] The cavalry have been drinking. You can smell it on their breath. They're fuelled by beer, and fear and hatred. [SHOUTING] Put your weapons down. Ye Gods, can you not see, there are unarmed women and children in the crowd? Have you lost your senses? Stop this madness - leave them alone. [HE IS ARRESTED AND LEAVES THE STAGE]

INTERLUDE 3

DANIEL: [SPOTLIGHT FRONT LEFT. ACTS OUT THE FOLLOWING...] Betty, where are you? You weren't there, where you said you'd be. Please God you stay safe. I'm trying to push through the throngs of sweating, panicking people. Like desperate rats, we frantically search for escape. Women and children are screaming, staining the air with terror. Hussars are pushing in behind me, slicing their sabres. I try to seek refuge in the Quaker Meeting House but we are trapped. The 88th Foot have blocked our escape down Mount Street. They stand firm in guard formation, lethal bayonets fixed, pointing provocatively at the desperate pushing people. The Hussars are closing down on us from

behind. They're like wild beasts, homing in for the kill. I'm pinned against the high wall. We have nowhere to go - sitting ducks for their savage attacks. Ahhhhh. I am shot in the leg. I fall to the ground and my left arm is slashed to shreds as I try to protect my face. My heart pounds and the blood pumps from my body.

INTERLUDE 4

ANN FILDES: [SPOTLIGHT FRONT CENTRE. CARRYING BABY. ACTS OUT THE FOLLOWING...] I feel faint. My head is spinning. I've lost my husband. Where is he? Please, I need help. Someone help me. Little William, stop crying, please. I must get away, out of the crush. I need to breathe. The thundering hooves of the horses and the shrill cries of my baby resonate round my head till I'm dizzy. The big brutes keep pushing past me. I can see the sergeant major trying to catch up with his men, his black mare trampling over the bodies. My friends are tossed aside like skittles. He reaches me and the haunch of the horse smashes into my back with a bang. I'm winded and knocked to the ground. In the commotion I lose my grip on my precious baby. He's tossed out of my arms and under the feet of stampeding horses and panicking people. I scabble desperately to retrieve his lifeless little body. [QUIETLY SOBBING] He's not crying now.

INTERLUDE 5

CHARLES: [SHOUTING] Cut them down, cut them down. [NARR] They're like rats fleeing from a sinking ship.

LIZZIE FARREN [SPOTLIGHT FRONT LEFT. SHOUTING TO IMAGINARY MR TEBBUT. ACTING OUT THE FOLLOWING...] Mr Tebbut – stop this. It's me – Lizzie Farren. Your neighbour. Mr Tebbut – no! Your sabre. Aaah [SHREIKS AS SHE IS STABBED] You've cut me head. Get off. Aah, blood. Stop it – stop. Mr Tebbut? Don't you know me? STOP! [SHE DIES]

CATHERINE: [SPOTLIGHT FRONT RIGHT. TALKING TO BETTY WHO HAS BEEN WOUNDED] Oh no, there's blood everywhere. Betty, what have the brutes done to you? Let me help you. Come on, get up. Please. Look, take my hand. We must get off this field. Please don't faint. Look at me. Betty...Betty. Press this shawl to your stomach. Stop the blood flowing. Come, give me your arm. That's it – slowly, slowly does it. I can see a way through. There's a gap between the horses – over there. Look up, ahead, that's it. Oh God, there's so many bodies. It's like a battlefield. [BOTH LIMP OFF STAGE BACK LEFT. CATHERINE SUPPORTING BETTY]

INTERLUDE 6

SPECIAL CONSTABLE: [SPOTLIGHT FRONT CENTRE] I wanted to do the right thing. No-one explained that a constable's duties involved beating our neighbours with truncheons. I want to protect my town, make the streets safe for our wives and children, restore peace. The nation

stumbles towards anarchy, the king is in danger, law and order is threatened. I am here. I accept the challenge to defend our way of life.

But since when has that meant attacking defenceless women, innocent children? I am sickened to the stomach. I see the other special constables, respectable men – shopkeepers, hatters, dyers – pillars of the community – with cruelty chiselled on their faces and their hands dripping in blood.

[SHOUTING] You, Yeoman stop, stop beating this poor woman. Let her go. Have your senses left you completely? [TO INJURED PERSON] Here, get up, lean on me. I'll look after you. I'll carry you to the Infirmary. [HELPS THE WOMAN. BOTH EXIT BACK LEFT]

DOCTOR:

[ENTERS FRONT RIGHT, SUPPORTING INJURED WOMAN. STAND IN SPOTLIGHT FRONT CENTRE] Quick, this girl is bleeding to death. More bandages, over here. Any spare beds? No? We'll have to line them up outside now. Morphine, I need morphine now. [NARR] Still they come – bloodied and bruised. Broken ribs, wounded arms, slashed faces, fractured legs – young men, old women, children, pregnant mothers, brothers, sisters, fathers, sons, humankind – thrashed to within an inch of its life. Their hopes and dreams seep from their bodies onto the bloodied floor.

EVERYONE QUIETLY GETS UP AND LEAVES THE STAGE AS MUSIC STARTS.
TABLE AND ALL BENCHES AND PROPS REMOVED EXCEPT
ONE BENCH WHICH HUNT MOVES DOWN STAGE CENTRE.

Music. Track 10: Peterloo Reprise

SCENE TWELVE: INT. A PRISON CELL.

SOUND OF SLAMMING PRISON DOOR AND SHOUTING GUARDS.

HUNT

[READING BACK A LETTER HE HAS JUST WRITTEN. SITS ON BENCH AND PACES HIS CELL.]

My darling, I'm writing this letter to you from my cell in Ilchester Gaol. Thank God you didn't come to the trial. It was the right decision to stay away - an unsavoury business from start to finish. The jury was out for several hours. I think one or two of them were sympathetic to old Henry Hunt but in the end they all came down against me. Two and half years' incarceration for trying to talk about improving the lives of working class people. I think some of the others from the platform party got off lighter but these are dark days for free speech.

Conditions in prison seem to have deteriorated since my last spell 20 years ago. Then it was only six weeks. I'm sure two and half years are going to feel like an eternity. I'm already going mad with boredom and

the filth. I am certain every day will feel like a decade in this insanitary hell hole.

I think of you often, sat in your favourite armchair, looking out to sea, in sunny Brighton. Your world seems a hundred million miles from mine. Try to stay cheerful. All those awful prigs will feel terribly pleased with themselves and say – “I told you he was a bad lot.” But keep faith with me. Send your love, that’s all I ask.

Have you heard anything from my children? Do they know of the fate that has befallen their father? My wife has disowned me and refuses to have any communication with me at all. Who can blame her, I suppose?

Have you heard what they’re calling it? The Peterloo Massacre. Apparently the journalist James Wroe came up with that rather clever play on St Peter’s Fields and the battle of Waterloo. And the name seems to be sticking. And do you remember that pompous man, Donald Read? He’s apparently written an article saying that only in peace-loving England, would 11 deaths be designated a massacre! What an idiot. And these are the morons who run the country. What hope do we have?

The repercussions have been terrible. I understand a few more people have since died from their wounds and some 600 poor souls are injured. Really it feels like all I have done is led an army of lemmings to a thick wall and watched them all bash their brains out, just for amusement. I wonder how many more bloodied walls we will have to bang against before we change the law? The frustration is overwhelming....

[HUNT EXITS AND TAKES BENCH WITH HIM]

Music: Track 19: If Only

SCENE THIRTEEN: EXT. A STREET SCENE IN MANCHESTER A FEW WEEKS LATER.

CATHERINE [NARR – ADDRESSES AUDIENCE FRONT CENTRE] That day changed everything. Thankfully Mary Fildes recovered from her horrendous injuries but many bore the scars for the rest of their lives. And down at Westminster, everyone just turned their backs. Carried on as if nothing had happened.

CHARACTERS HURRY ON AND OFF STAGE WITH A PURPOSE. STOP TO CHAT. SOUND OF A BEGGAR CRYING OUT. CATHERINE ENTERS INTO STREET, CARRYING A BASKET OF FOOD UNDER HER ARM. SHE BUMPS INTO BETTY, LOOKING DOWN AT HEAL, WALKING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION

CATHERINE: [TO BETTY] Betty, it is you! How are you?

BETTY: Hello, Miss Gilmore.

CATHERINE: Are you recovered? I was so worried for you. I tried to persuade Father to keep you on, you know?

BETTY: I know.

CATHERINE: There was no reasoning with him afterwards. He couldn't bear the thought we'd disobeyed him.

BETTY: I don't blame you.

CATHERINE: I feel it's all my fault though. I should have stopped you.

BETTY: I made my own decision.

CATHERINE: How are you? How's Daniel? I hear he was badly wounded?

BETTY: I'm fine, much better, but he's had to have his arm amputated after all those sabre wounds. The doctor couldn't save it. He's got a bit of feeling in his left leg but not much. He's trying... and pretending he doesn't mind too much. It's very hard.

CATHERINE: Poor man.

BETTY: He's still getting treatment at the infirmary, although we're not owning up to where he got his wounds. [RUEFULLY] It doesn't do to be associated with the radicals.

CATHERINE: No, you've both paid a heavy price. Have you found any more work?

BETTY: Nobody round here is prepared to take on a 'revolutionary' maid.

CATHERINE: But how will they know?

BETTY: Well I'm hardly getting glowing references from your father.

CATHERINE: I'm sorry. Are you still going ahead with your wedding?

BETTY: Yes, we're getting married next week. We thought we'd make a fresh start in Birmingham. We've got the relief money and we're not known there. Might be easier.

CATHERINE: Oh for your sake, I hope so.

BETTY: My brother says there's buckle factories looking out for new workers, so we thought we'd try our luck.

CATHERINE: Look, let me give you another reference. It's the least I can do.

BETTY: Oh thank you.

CATHERINE: I'm just dropping off this food to a family who used to work for us. The Arkwrights – do you remember them?

BETTY: Aye, I think so.

CATHERINE: Seven children and no mother now. I'm still having to play cat and mouse with Father. He thinks I'm out visiting my dress maker. But when I get home I'll write it directly and have it sent round.

BETTY: That's kind, thank you, Miss.

CATHERINE: Good luck. Stay strong. We keep fighting.

ALL CAST ON STAGE: [PUNCHING THE AIR] We keep fighting!

Music. Track 20: Weavers' March

[CURTAIN]