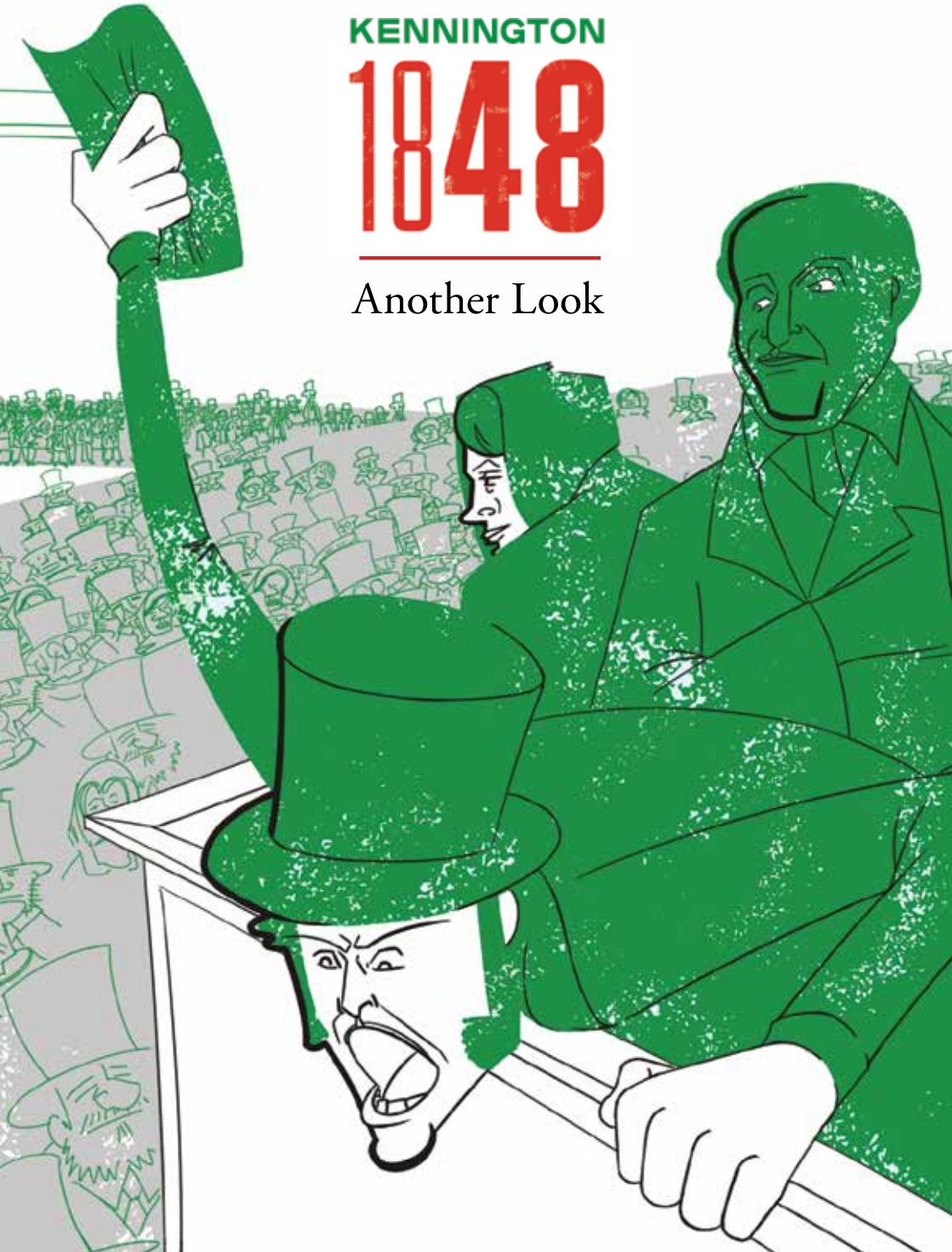
KENNINGTON 1848

Another Look



KENNINGTON

1848

Another Look

The **Kennington Chartist Project** was initiated in 2018 by local residents, to celebrate the legacy of the 1848 Chartist rally on Kennington Common.

The first volume of **Kennington 1848** is called **Our Story**. In that book, we gave an introduction to what happened in Kennington in 1848, and an account of our project in 2018.

This second volume of **Kennington 1848** is called **Another Look**. Here, we explore in greater depth the people and place that contributed to this significant event.

The **Kennington Chartist Project** is supported by the Friends of Kennington Park, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and the Lipman-Miliband Trust.

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How many were in the Crowd?

by Dave Steele

"The procession is now filing on to the common ... but not the slightest appearance of arms or bludgeons"

April 10th 1848 represented a power struggle between a powerful elite and a disempowered population, acted out in a very public way in Kennington. Argument about whether April 10th represents the high or low point of this struggle revolves around the attendance figures on that damp Common.

From the minute the crowd dispersed, arguments erupted over attendance figures. Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor claimed up to 400,000 while *The Times* reported a crowd as low as 20,000:

"We were told that 200,000 men were to march through London and take up their station on the new Runnymede. Every attempt was made to procure that number… the sum of all the processions that closed the bridges towards Kennington Common yesterday was not more than seven thousand. We doubt whether more than three thousand are added from south of the Thames. At the crisis of the meeting, the total number on the Common, including the most incurious and indifferent of the spectators and bystanders, was not 20,000."[1]

In 1854, the first Chartist historian, Robert Gammage, assigned a figure of 150-170,000 – largely upheld by recent historians.[2] Political crowd figures are always contentious (there is no consensus about attendance at the 2003 Stop the War demonstration in London or the 2017 Trump inauguration in Washington). So figures for an event 170 years ago must also be speculative at best. Who was right? I attempt to revisit this debate using a simple evidence-based technique – counting.

The power of pictures

As well as in power politics, the Kennington event is also significant in technological terms. The government used the railway network to move large numbers of troops into the capital and requisitioned the new Electric Telegraph to communicate orders. But most significantly, the Great Chartist Meeting was one of the first outdoor political crowds to be photographed. Two daguerreotypes by photographer William Kilburn show the crowd in stunning detail. For historians these images represent hard evidence of attendance numbers [Fig. 1, on pp.8-9].

Kilburn could command high fees for daguerreotype portraits in his Regent Street studio. So it is reasonable to assume that he was commissioned, and there are three candidates for this patronage:[3] Possibly the *Illustrated London News* which published an engraving of one image in its April 15th edition. Or perhaps the Metropolitan Police. Were these images an early form of police crowd-surveillance – the forerunner of police use of CCTV? There is no record of daguerreotypes in Metropolitan Police archives; and in surveillance terms they would have had limited value as the crowd is looking away from the camera. The surprising prime candidate as Kilburn's commissioner is Prince Albert, a keen photographer, who engaged Kilburn to take portraits of the Royal Family.[4] The originals of Kilburn's plates are in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle and the frames even bear Queen Victoria's handwriting. On a pair of accompanying calotype prints, Albert wrote: "Photograph View taken

1 *The Times,* 11 April 1848

2 R G Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement 1837-1854* (London, 1969), p.314; David Goodway, *London Chartism 1838-1848* (Cambridge, 1982), p.50; Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: a New History* (Manchester, 2007), p.302

3 Frances Dimond and Roger Taylor, *Crown and Camera* (Harmondsworth, 1987), p.217

4 The Prince had an interest in social issues and expressed concern for the working man. On 18 May 1848, against the advice of the Prime Minister, he addressed a meeting of the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes of which he was the President. The society engaged architect Henry Roberts, a pioneer in the improvement of working-class housing, to design the Prince Consort's Model Lodge for the Great Exhibition of 1851. After the exhibition, in 1852, the Lodge was moved to Kennington Park. Since 2003, it has been the HQ of national tree charity, Trees for Cities

◀ Chartist Meeting on Kennington Common. Royal Collection Trust © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019

of the Kennington Meeting by Mr Kilburn."

Whether these images are reportage, surveillance or royal memento, they provide historians with a rich source from which to interpret the event. They have been cited as evidence that the event was a success but also to denigrate it as a failure.[5]

How did I count the crowd?

I combined the daguerreotypes into a single panorama which shows the uneven density of the crowd with denser squares near the stages and gaps in the distance and to the left [Fig. 2]. Then I superimposed a grid to make counting easier, which revealed a surprisingly small total of just 3,445 people in the frame. This flies in the face of accepted figures so I considered other factors: Crucially, the time of day and position of the camera. How much of the Common can we see? I knew the procession carrying the Chartist leaders left Fitzroy Square at 10am. A two hour trip including a stop to collect the petition indicates an arrival time of 11.30-12.30. It rained heavily from around 2pm on the 10th.[6] It is not raining in the pictures, so I assume the image was taken before 2pm when the site had cleared.[7] Shadows on the horizon show strong sun – compatible

Fig. 2 Panoramic sectional grid used to count the Kennington crowd

5 Jo Briggs, *Novelty Fair – British Visual Culture between Chartism and the Great Exhibition* (Manchester, 2016), p.40

6 Goodway, *London Chartism,* p.140

7 *Illustrated London News,* 15 April 1848

with a 30° elevation of midday sun, suggesting an exposure time between 11.30am and 12.30pm.[8] A police memo, timed at 11.15, states: "The procession is now filing on to the Common... but not the slightest appearance of arms or bludgeons. They have formed from 7 to 8 deep and at the time the procession arrived there were then present on the Common above 5,000 persons and the approaches crowded with spectators."[9] This seems to confirm the time as after 11.15am.

Where was the camera?

The photographs indicate an elevated position for the camera facing south-east with a vantage point above the crowd. The central location of the Oil of Vitriol Factory chimney (now the site of St Agnes Church) confirms this. Processions can be seen arriving from the south-east. So I assume the entire east-west depth of the Common is visible.

A first or second floor window would have provided Kilburn with a superb vantage point. Horns Tavern [Fig. 3], at the junction of what is now Kennington Park Road and Kennington Road, is the main candidate.

Fig. 3 Possible camera locations in Horns Tavern and Watkins' Italian Warehouse, 1842. Note St Mark's Church in the background. Engraving image courtesy of Mark Crail

8 http://bit.ly/2k1n7OK

9 The National Archives, HO45/2410

However the two visualisations in Fig. 4 show the angle from the Horns Tavern is slightly wrong. A first or second floor window in Watkins' Italian Warehouse across the road is an equally strong contender.

I projected the camera field of view for each building. Then I matched the buildings on the horizon to a street map indicating that almost the entire east side of the Common is visible [Fig. 4].

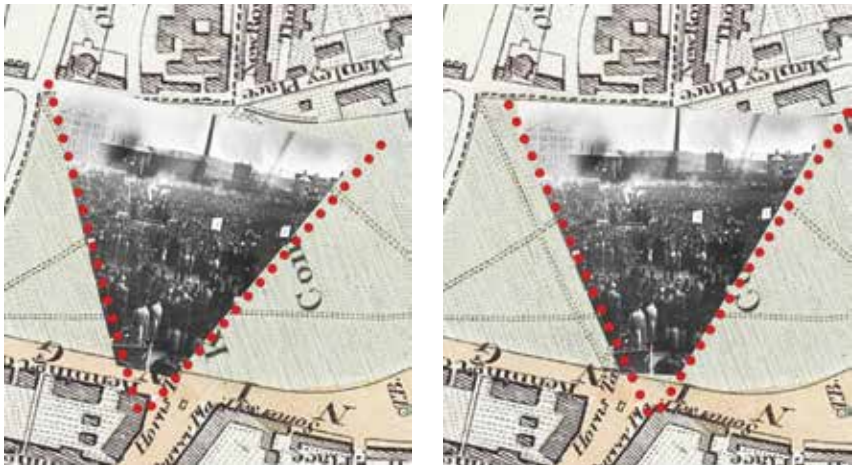


Fig. 4 Visualisations of perspective frame superimposed on Greenwood's 1830 map

What was the capacity of the Common?

The area of Kennington Park today is around 86,502m^2. However a Greenwood's 1830 map shows the Common was smaller before enclosure with an area of just 57,000m^2 [Fig. 5].[10]

Taking an average of 1.5 people per square metre[11] the theoretical capacity of Kennington Common in 1848 was around 85,500 people.[12]

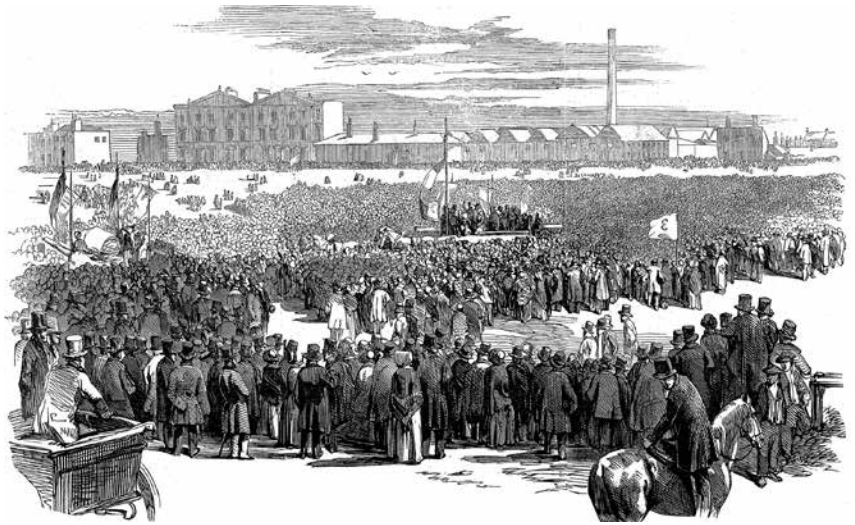
However Kilburn only captured 40 percent of the common and the crowd density is far from even. We can see this in an artist's impression

10 http://bit.ly/2jYTIVm
11 http://www.gkstill.com/Support/crowd-density/100sm/Density1.html
12 *Time Magazine,* 7 April 1967, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,843533,00.html (16 January 2011)

◀ Fig. 5 Area calculation of Kennington Common in 1848 © calcmaps.com

of the event in the *Illustrated London News* [Fig. 6]. Large areas of the common are empty with clustering around the speakers, presumably in order to stand any chance of hearing them. The empty patch to the north-east of the common was a wet area, still badly drained today. The fall-off in density was more marked towards the edges. So the average density for the whole

▼ Fig. 6 Engraving from daguerreotype, published in the *Illustrated London News*, April 15 1848



common could be as low as 0.5ppsm which would reduce the expected capacity to just 25,500.

So how many attended?

25,500 exceeds the crowd I counted from the pictures by a factor of five. There are several explanations for this [see Fig. 7]. An allowance can be made for a miscount by doubling the visible number at 12.30pm to 7,000. We can add a further 3,500 for people on the common outside the field of view. A further 3,500 people may have arrived after Kilburn took the pictures. We might also allow an additional 3,500 to cover curious spectators who refrained from entering the common for fear of being caught up in any affray. Tentative supporters like artists John Millais and William Holman Hunt joined the procession from Russell Square but observed proceedings from outside the rails.[13] If we add a further 2,000 for people observing the event from upstairs windows this brings the total to 20,000 – within reasonable range of the theoretical capacity of 25,000.

Despite these adjustments, the total is well short of the more extravagant claims of O'Connor and many historians.

Calculation/estimate	
Visible crowd within the common around midday	7,000
Estimated crowd outside the field of view	3,500
Arrived later (say by 1pm peak)	3,500
Spectators observing from outside railings	3,500
Spectators observing from buildings around the common	2,500
Total	**20,000**

Fig. 7 Kennington Crowd Calculations

There is evidence to support the argument for an attendance on April 10th of under 25,000. Does this downplay the significance of the Great Chartist Meeting? Or in reality, does it do the opposite? The state perceived the crowds to be massive and seriously powerful as evidenced by their disproportionate martial response. If our modest estimates are correct, the Chartists were outnumbered several times over by the 8,000 troops, 4,000 police and 80,000 special constables listed as being on duty in the capital according to the Home Office Archives. A relatively small

13 Goodway, *London Chartism,* p.140

number of protestors were perceived by the government as representing a serious and imminent threat.

Clearly the Chartists were successful in the projection of power – punching way above their weight in terms of numbers.

Dave Steele *is a PhD candidate in the University of Warwick History department. His research explores the size and dynamics of 19th Century British political crowds.* ***(warwick.ac.uk/davesteele)***

Who was there?

by Vic Clarke

"... the fustian jackets, blistered hands, and unshorn chins ..."

There are many conflicting accounts of Kennington Common on 10th April 1848. We know why the event was held, and we even know why people were there, but one question remains: *who* was there?

The Chartist movement grew from many small communities all over Britain into one very large one, communicating through lecture tours and the major newspaper of the movement, the *Northern Star,* with its eight broadsheet pages. I've examined the rich pages of the *Northern Star* to find out who was there at the Kennington 1848 rally, and what kind of people considered themselves to be a Chartist.

Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor, originally founded the *Northern Star* in Leeds in 1837 then moved it to London in 1844. What is significant about the *Star* is the way it crossed boundaries: it sat between local and national news; it was both a newspaper and an activist newsletter; it employed its own journalists and yet depended heavily on reports sent by its own readers – it had a full and lively 'Readers and Correspondents' column. The anonymity of most of the letters does not help us, but their self-chosen pen names give us hints: take 'Two Ultra Radical Ladies,' who sent a poem in 1839.[1] 'Ladies' suggests a level above working class women, and not just radical but 'ultra' radical, a reference to the radical tradition of eighteenth-century revolutionaries such as Thomas Paine.

In the nineteenth century, the 'identity politics' of gender, race, class and sexuality was expressed more subtly. The Chartist movement was made up, in the majority, of working class people: Feargus O'Connor, in

1 'Readers and Correspondents,' *Northern Star,* 6 July 1839

◀ Part of the procession at Blackfriars. Detail, *Illustrated London News,* 15 April 1848

his weekly editorial, addressed his letters to "the fustian jackets, blistered hands, and unshorn chins..." This clearly indicates gender, and invites a contrast between his rough and ready audiences, and the silken coats and clean shaven chins of the upper classes. Interestingly, the William Kilburn daguerreotype photograph of the 1848 rally shows men in dark top hats and longer coats, and women in large bonnets. Was this closer to Sunday best than work clothes? If it was, it suggests the significance and the reverence these kinds of events held in the hearts and minds of Chartists, and that 10th April 1848 was, indeed, a special day.

The daguerreotype features crowds comprised mostly of men, and the *Star* suggests that the majority of Chartists were white, working class men of working age. While several women did write in to the *Star,* they were mostly portrayed as wives and mothers of Chartists, and it was in this domestic, traditionally and explicitly feminine role that they served the movement. At an 1847 'soirée' in Bradford, the lecturer, a Mrs Leek, addressed her 'sisters and friends':

> "Sisters, you who have thought, politics belonged to men only, say to your husbands, 'Is there no way whereby this brand of slavery can be removed?' ... If the law is to blame, up and aid to the removal of such law ... Work with them, and I implore you as a Christian, as a man, husband, father, never to cease until you ... are politically free. (Cheers.)"[2]

Early in the movement there were many women's suffrage groups, most notably in Birmingham and London, though later the strategy of women activists changed to agitation in the home and challenging their husbands. The challenge to white working masculinity is a recurrent theme throughout Chartism.

Another theme in the *Star* is 'slavery'. There are references to 'white slavery' or 'wage slavery,' which to a 21st century reader, uncomfortably equates their experience with the horrors experienced by African slaves. William Cuffay, a black tailor whose parents were held in chattel slavery in St Kitt's, was a prominent London Chartist. He addressed a crowd of tailors at a National Charter Association meeting. He "commenced by informing them that he should not make the usual apologies of

2 'Chartist Intelligence,' *Northern Star,* 4 Sept 1847

incompetency, &c., but as a working man, a tailor, and a Chartist, he would not shrink from any performance of any public duty that his fellow-tradesmen and brother-slaves elected him to perform. (Cheers.)"

Cuffay asserts his right to belong and indeed, to lead this group. He aligns himself with his audience using the group pronouns 'fellow-tradesmen and brother-slaves,' – all the more pertinent considering his own heritage. The use of familial and fraternal ties is common in the rhetoric of Chartism, as Mrs Leek's address to her 'sisters' demonstrates. This fits in with the tradition of the 'patriotic band' fighting for their rights, and implies a sense of community and camaraderie. So while Chartists used identity politics – identifying with their trades, as temperance advocates, as women or men – they also manipulated their identity to establish togetherness.

Cuffay continues his lecture, "in beautiful and manly language," and "urged them not to desert their father land, but to stay in it, and make it worthy of them. If any must emigrate let it be the aristocracy."

He concludes with the following sarcastic lines:

> "If bugs molest me, as in bed I lie,
> I'll not quit my bed for them, not I;
> But rout the vermin – every bug destroy,
> New make my bed, and all its sweets enjoy."[3]

The workers have made their bed; they can change the sheets; they are the majority. His poem, proud, provocative and suggestive, roused the crowd to cheers.

The community of Chartists was a widespread one. The way that individuals affirmed their identities allowed them to distinguish themselves and build towards a 'Chartist' identity. Long before discussions about gender, sexuality, race, and privilege entered the mainstream, the Chartists were already showing us how to discuss and negotiate identity politics.

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3 'Chartist Intelligence,' *Northern Star,* 5 March 1842

Who was William Cuffay?

by S I Martin

"This clapping of hands is all very fine,
but will you fight for it?"

The only reliable portrait of William Cuffay shows him standing in a cell in London's Newgate prison. He is standing before a small window which is barred yet open to the elements. His convict transport record described him as "rather bald, with thin bones and spine deformed," yet here Cuffay's posture is upright, at ease and composed. The quality and cleanliness of his clothes belie the fact that he had been in a series of jails for over a year and testify, perhaps, to some pride in his profession as a tailor. What we can't tell from the picture is that Cuffay is only four feet eleven inches tall. He is a man of mixed race with obvious African ancestry who confidently returns the viewer's gaze with an open, wry expression. He is 61 years old and is awaiting his transportation: a journey of 103 days on a filthy, crammed, prison ship to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) where he expects to be incarcerated for the 'term of his natural life.'

In 1772, a 'negro man' and a 'negro woman' named as Chatham Cuffay and Lynda Myra Cuffay were baptised at Chatham in Kent. We can probably link the name Cuffay to the day-name Kofi, from the Akan people of Ghana and one of the few African names enslaved people carried with them across the Atlantic. Lynda and Chatham might have been siblings, mother and son or indeed, unrelated enslaved people bearing a forced family name from a common slave master. Could they have been freed persons? We don't yet know, nor how they came to be in south east England. Chatham Cuffay, recorded as 17 at the time of his baptism, appears to have worked as a cook and a docker.

◀ William Cuffay, lithograph, 1848 © National Portrait Gallery, London

Black labour was an essential part of British maritime trade and naval power. Like other ports, Chatham had a growing African and Asian population of mainly seamen and servants (both enslaved and free). Although the Cuffays would certainly have stood out in 18th century Kent, they belonged to a network of non-white people living in the Medway towns. Did they know the Jamaican-born black man Thomas Pethen of Chatham? Were they familiar with Thomas Baker, Susannah Fortune, Robert Sandwich or a host of others who appear in local parish records?

Chatham Cuffay married a local woman, Juliana Fox. On 6th July 1788, Juliana gave birth to a son William, one of five children. William was apprenticed to a local tailor and initially worked for Matthews and Acworth of Chatham High Street. After moving to London, he got involved in the Tailors' Strike of 1834, demanding shorter hours and more pay, and ended up losing his job and blacklisted. Thereafter he worked as a self-employed tailor from premises in North Lambeth's Lower Marsh and later in Covent Garden. Although he married three times, William Cuffay left no surviving children. As an activist, he soon distinguished himself through his spellbinding oratory and was offered positions of leadership. In 1839, he was a founder of the Metropolitan Tailors' Charter Association and two years later, he was the Westminster Chartists' delegate to the Metropolitan Delegate Council. Following the arrest of the Chartist leaders in 1842, the movement appointed William Cuffay as interim president.

Cuffay's connection with the organisation as a black man, and his ascent through its ranks, is not as bizarre as it might seem. Indeed, one month before the great Chartist rally of 10th April 1848, Kennington Common was the scene of another large Chartist assembly which resulted in outbreaks of running violence as far as Camberwell. The police arrested 'ringleaders' including David Anthony Duffy, a 'man of colour' and unemployed seaman, known to the police as 'a beggar in the Mint.' Benjamin Prophett, 29, another seaman and 'man of colour,' known as 'Black Ben,' stood trial with him. Opponents claimed the presence of Africans and Irishmen in the Chartist ranks and leadership was proof that the movement could never represent the aspirations of British workers.

The Times, which had prevously disparaged Cuffay and the Chartists as "The black man and his party" reported that "Cuffey is half a nigger. Some of the others are Irishmen. We doubt if there are half-a-dozen Englishmen in the whole lot."

Cuffay was part of a long tradition of minority involvement in domestic labour struggles. British organised labour and workers of colour forged links as early as the late 18th century during the movement for the abolition of the slave trade. Black writers and community organisers were among the first to connect the plight of white waged and black enslaved labour. African activists resident in Britain like Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoano stressed that both had a duty to seek liberty and self-determination. They found eager associates in the London Corresponding Society and other early reform groups. Equiano's scholarly, rather gentlemanly, approach based in Christian fellowship and Cugoano's call for abolition based on mutual economic interests, encouraged readers to look sympathetically on the plight of Africans in bondage and to draw sincere, if maladroit, parallels with the sufferings of disenfranchised Britons.

In early 19th century London, the Jamaican radical Robert Wedderburn went further. Encouraged by the Haitian Revolution, in fiery speeches and publications, he called for the violent overthrow of plantation slavery, the monarchy, the priesthood and much else besides.

Equally set on forceful revolution was William Davidson (also known as *Black* Davidson) a one-time resident of Walworth Road. An occasional confederate of Wedderburn, he fell in with the Cato Street Conspirators who, in 1820, attempted to assassinate the entire cabinet. Davidson was amongst the six plotters found guilty of treason and executed.

By conflating the hardships faced by British workers with those of enslaved Africans the Chartists laid themselves open to the accusation of diminishing the much greater suffering of those in bondage. The comparison between the two classes of labour did not go unremarked by more cynical activists. In 1830 Richard Oastler the 'Tory Radical' addressing the issue of child labour in Britain observed: "The nation is now most resolutely determined that negroes shall be free. Let them, however, not forget that Britons have common rights with Afric's sons…"

William Cuffay combined both aspects of Black British political engagement. Always mild-mannered, thoughtful and articulate, he was willing to compromise across all ideological lines, save one. The fault line running through the Chartist movement was the issue of the use of violence and the appropriate response to violence. On one side the Moral Force Chartists placed their faith in petitions and campaigning to achieve their ends. In opposition to this was the Physical Force wing who were prepared take up arms if necessary. Cuffay was resolutely and vocally on the side of Physical Force. His principles would be tested during the great Chartist Rally of 10th April 1848.

William Cuffay's official leadership role was Chairman for managing the procession which would take the People's Charter to Parliament. He used that role to advance the use of Physical Force Chartism at every opportunity. During the planning phase, after rumours that the government was going to ban the rally, 48 of 49 delegates agreed to send a deputation to the Home Secretary to reassure him the day would pass without violence. The sole objector was William Cuffay. He wanted the masses to seize the day, regardless of the outcome, rather than placate the government.

Cuffay's militancy was evident. He urged: "the men of London were up to the mark, and were eager for the fray," and reminded them there were only 5,000 soldiers in London. As the day drew near, he frequently dismissed moderate positions: on one occasion responding to a cautious speech with "This clapping of hands is all very fine, but will you fight for it?"

Ultimately, the more timid of the Chartist leadership set the tone on 10th April. Overwhelmed and bewildered by the forces arrayed against them (as well as the militancy of some of their confederates), they called off the planned procession to Parliament and the People's Charter was delivered in plain hackney cabs. Once again, the loudest voice pushing for a mass physical response was William Cuffay's, but, without a procession, his objections were futile.

After the Orange Tree Conspiracy of August 1848, sometimes called the last planned rebellion on British soil, police arrested Cuffay in a round-up of militant Chartists. On the evidence of police spies, the charge against

him was that he "feloniously did compass and imagine to levy war against the Queen to compel her to change her councils," and sought to "depose the Queen from the style, honour and dignity of the Imperial Crown, etc…." While in Newgate awaiting his transportation, Cuffay again found himself under attack from the press. In the satirical magazine, *Punch,* the author William Makepeace Thackeray, mocked him, his political ambitions and, above all, his race:

"Ven this bad year began,
The nex man said, seysee,
'I vas a Journeyman,
A taylor black and free,
And my wife went out and chaired about,
And my name's the bold Cuffee"

Cuffay arrived in Hobart, Tasmania on the ship *Adelaide* in November 1849. His wife joined him in 1853. He gained his freedom in 1856 and, despite plying his trade as a tailor, he died in 1870 a pauper in the workhouse, having fought for the rights of working men and women to the end.

There is still no monument or memorial to William Cuffay, but the words of his friend and fellow Chartist, Thomas Martin Wheeler, encourage us to honour his memory:

"Yes, Cuffay, should these lines ever meet thine eyes in thy far-distant home, yes, my friend, though thou hast fallen – thou hast fallen with the great and noble of the earth... Faint not, mine old companion, the darkness of the present time will but render more intense the glowing light of the future."

S I Martin *is an author and heritage consultant (****www.simartin.org.uk****)*

Chartist Women and the Vote

by Marietta Crichton Stuart

"Debased is the man who would say
women have no right to interfere in politics,
when it is evident that they have
as much right as a man"

Universal Suffrage was the first of the six points of the People's Charter launched in 1838. 'Suffrage' means the right to vote – we've all heard of the 'Suffragettes'. What about 'Universal'? Today we assume it means everybody – men and women. So it's a surprise to discover the Chartists' call for universal suffrage was only: "A vote for every man twenty-one years of age, of sound mind and not undergoing punishment for crime." So what was the Chartists' attitude to women?

Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor declared "Go on, good men! Go on, virtuous women! Go on little children! We are engaged in the cause of justice, which is the cause of God... let every man, woman and child sign the petition." Did he mean it?

Chartists often used the term 'the people' and this included men, women and children. Indeed, Chartism was both a family movement and a mass political movement. In the early days, women were very active and made up nearly 20 percent of the 1.28m signatures on the 1839 charter. However, by 1848, this figure dropped to 8 percent of the 1.975m signatures. Historian Malcolm Chase suggests this is when the Chartist movement changed "from being community-based and often 'out of doors' agitation to indoor 'respectability,' becoming more formalised."

Women were legally entitled to sign petitions, but their signatures were given no weight. The *Greenock Advertiser* called the 1848 petition an 'impudent hoax' because it contained fictitious signatures. The paper

◀ Anne Knight, photo Victor Franck, c1855

was equally upset that it "bore the signatures of an immense number of women" and that it was also, for good measure, "filled with blasphemy, impurity and the most filthy obscenity."

Votes for women was never part of the Chartist programme. William Lovett, author of the People's Charter, claimed he had included provision for female suffrage in the first draft, but it was dropped in case it alienated potential supporters. There was a prejudice against women entering 'a man's world' and many feared it would jeopardise the prospect of votes for men. The Chartists did not accept gender equality, but for some there was an assumption that at some future time, female suffrage would follow. Early Chartist historians played down the role of women, worried it would not portray the Chartists as a serious political organisation.

Of course, men dominated the meeting platforms. But women worked as organisers and attended meetings and demonstrations including Kennington Common. They became lecturers, educated their children in Chartist ideals and even named them after Chartist leaders. Women were not just passive signatories. Some, including the Quakers, Elizabeth Pease, Jane Smeal and Anne Knight, had been involved in the anti-slavery campaign. In 1842, May Pares of Greenwich collected hundreds of signatures for the second Chartist petition and marched in the 50,000 strong demonstration to Westminster to present it.

In 1840, whilst in prison, Salford Chartist, RJ Richardson, in his pamphlet *The Rights of Women,* pointed out that a woman is qualified to be queen over a great nation and concluded: "It is a most introvertive fact, that women contribute to the wealth and resources of the kingdom. Debased is the man who would say women have no right to interfere in politics, when it is evident that they have as much right as a man."

There were Female Charter Associations in most of the large towns in Britain, maybe as many as 150 including more than twenty in Scotland. Inevitably, the press described them in derogatory terms as 'She-Chartists' and 'She-orators'. Susanna Inge of the City of London branch argued "assist those men who will, nay, who do, place women in an equality with themselves in gaining their rights, and ours will be gained also."

By the early 1850s, Chartism had faded and it was not until 1867 that there was an extension to male suffrage. The previous year, John Stuart

Mill MP had presented the first mass women's suffrage petition to the House of Commons, with 1,500 signatures. He tried, unsuccessfully, to amend the 1867 Second Reform Bill to grant the vote to women property holders. But it was a start, and from 1870 and the Married Women's Property Act, there was slow progress in women gaining the vote in local elections and the growth of the women's suffrage movement. After the Great War, in 1918, Parliament gave the vote to women over the age of 30 and men over the age of 21. However, the women had to be married to or a member of the Local Government Register. Finally, at long last, in July 1928, The Representation of the People Act entitled everyone over the age of 21 to vote and so, 80 years after the Chartist rally on Kennington Common, true universal suffrage was finally achieved.

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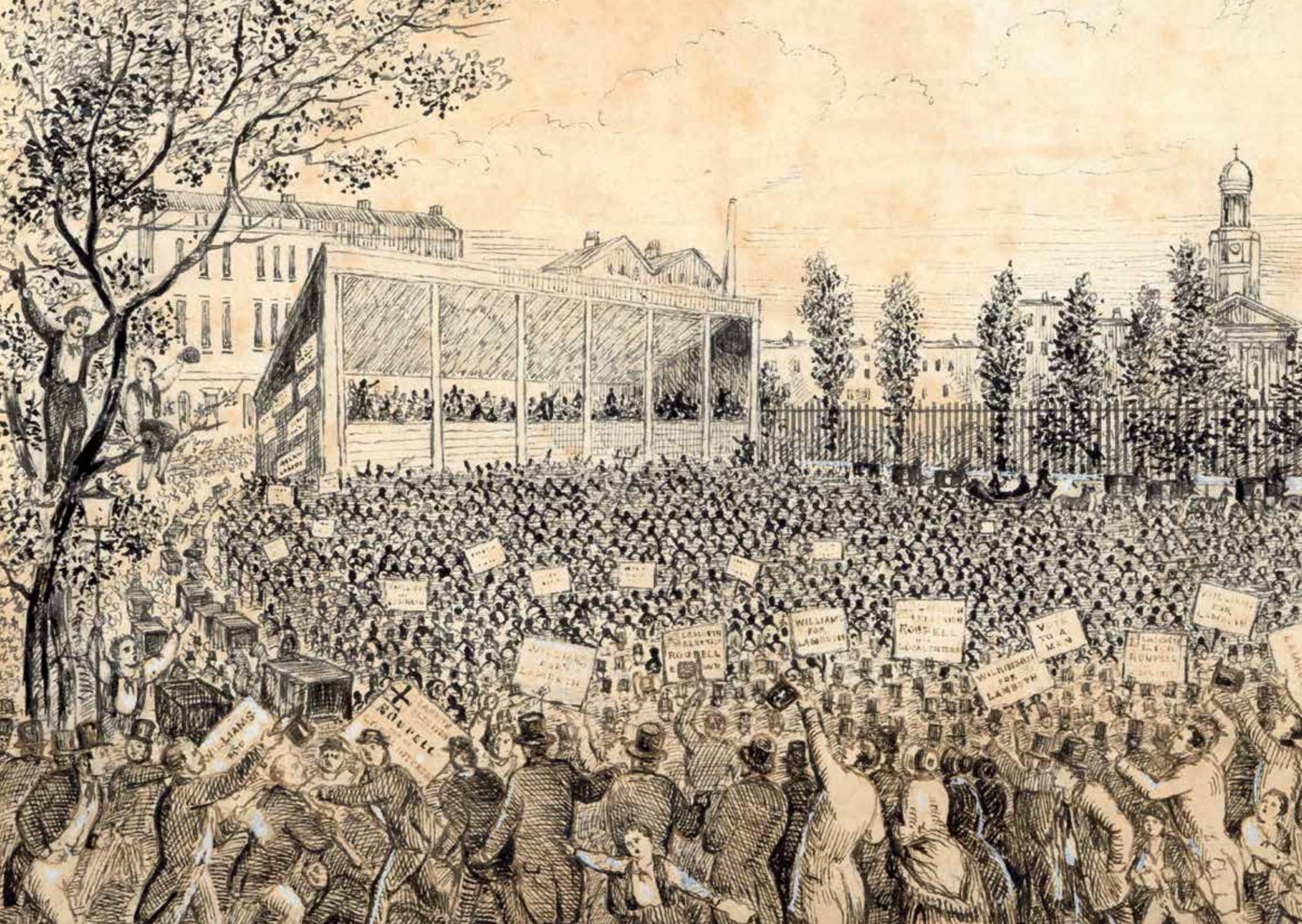
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VOTE FOR WILLIAMS FOR LAMBETH

Kennington Common, Protest and Public Space

by Katrina Navickas

"... the planting of a Tree of Liberty on the common ..."

The great Chartist meeting of 10th April 1848 was the culmination of a long history of public gatherings on Kennington Common, which has played a central role in the history of protest from the eighteenth century to the present day. The transformation of the Common into a park, and its use for meetings and gatherings in the 150 years that followed, reflects the wider story of our commons and parks in Britain.

Kennington Common before 1848

The Common was situated on the south east part of the Manor of Kennington, and included the area that is now the Park, the site of St Mark's Church, and the triangle of land between Brixton Road and Kennington Park Road. A 'common' suggests a publicly owned space. But usually they are private property, often owned by a large landowner. People enjoy common rights to access and use the space, but these rights were restricted to local tenants of the manor. Most of the Manor of Kennington was owned by the Duchy of Cornwall and in 1833 around 500 tenants of the Manor had the right to graze their cattle on the common.[1]

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Kennington Common was a site of duels and execution, with the gallows on the site of the church and triangle. On 30th July 1746, nine members of the Jacobite 'Manchester Regiment' were executed there. The last execution on the gallows was 'Mr Badger a fraudster' in 1799.[2] By then, the Common was already a site of large meetings: The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, had addressed thousands on the common in 1739. These religious meetings often coincided with the twice yearly hangings, resulting in large crowds.[3]

In response to the French Revolution from 1789, new societies were formed by working class people to campaign for democracy and reform of parliament. In London the demand for the vote was spearheaded by the Corresponding Society, set up by the shoemaker Thomas Hardy in 1792. Kennington Common played an important role in this early agitation. In 1792, on Guy Fawkes' night, 500 people marched by torchlight from Southwark to Kennington Common, carrying a placard demanding "Universal Liberty and no Despots." They set up a mock gallows and burned an effigy of the Duke of Brunswick, commander of the Austro-Prussian forces, to celebrate the expulsion of invading armies from revolutionary France. A 'proclamation' was printed on posters, declaring "The Duke of Brunswic [sic] having attempted to enslave France in an open violation of the eternal laws of Humanity and Justice, it has been determined to make an Example of him," whereas the 'committee' of radicals stood for the "name of Liberty, Equality and the Rights of Man."[4] The influence of the first part of Thomas Paine's bestseller *The Rights of Man,* supporting the French Revolution, was clear to see. Later that month, a clearly rattled government sent a troop of dragoons to Kennington to prevent "the planting of a Tree of Liberty on the common by one or two societies in town."[5]

Democratic agitation revived in 1815 after the Napoleonic wars, when economic depression hit many industries and food was scarce. The government response was the Seditious Meetings Acts of 1817 and 1819 which prohibited political meetings within a mile radius of Westminster Palace. Kennington was just outside the boundary but easily accessible from the centre of power. Following the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester

1 Survey of London, vol 26: Lambeth: Southern Area, pp.31-6

2 Stefan Szczelkun, *Kennington Park: The Birthplace of People's Democracy,* Past Tense, 1997
3 Richard Watson, *The Life of the Rev John Wesley,* John Mason, 1831, p.79
4 The National Archives, HO 42/22/294
5 *Derby Mercury,* 29 November 1792

◀ Previous page: Election Hustings, Kennington Park, 1857 © Lambeth Archives

in 1819, a mass meeting on the Kennington Common was scheduled for 23rd August. But after warnings by the Newington magistrates "a number of respectable inhabitants ... of Brixton enrolled themselves as special constables."[6] Evidently, the local radicals felt it too risky, postponed the meeting, and moved it to Smithfield.[7]

During 1830-32, in response to another French Revolution, political unions were formed by both middle and working classes to campaign for a Reform Act, to expand the vote and give representation to industrial cities. On 27th September 1830, after Henry 'Orator' Hunt spoke to a crowd on Kennington Common, the meeting drew up an "address to the King," complaining of "the present distressed state of the country."[8] The Reform Act of 1832 eventually extended the vote to householders owning £10 of property.

In April 1834, the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs', agricultural labourers from Dorset, were transported to Australia for forming a trade union. In their support, the Grand National Consolidated Union held a grand procession past parliament and ending at Kennington Common.[9] When the Martyrs were eventually pardoned, the Union held another mass procession on Easter Monday 1838, this time starting from Kennington Common.[10]

So Kennington Common was well established as a site of political meetings by the time of the Chartist movement. The first recorded mass gathering of Chartists on Monday 20th May 1839 attracted about 2,000 people[11] in support of the first Chartist petition to parliament. For the next demonstration on Monday 12th August 1839, the crowd marched from Lincoln's Inn Fields to Kennington, and erected a hustings in the middle of the Common.[12] Even larger protests accompanied the second Chartist petition of August 1842. The Chartist press reported that after a mass meeting on the Common on Tuesday 23rd August, the local

6 London Metropolitan Archives, Newington Petty Sessions book, 1810-19
7 *Morning Post,* 23 August 1819
8 *London Courier,* 27 September 1830
9 Herbert Vere Evatt, *The Tolpuddle Martyrs,* Sydney University Press, 2009
10 *London Courier,* 13 April 1838
11 *Morning Advertiser,* 21 May 1839
12 *Northern Star,* 17 August 1839

police ('blue rascals') used force to disperse the 'peaceable inhabitants', and between 300 and 400 people were injured.[13] The following week, a group of local gentlemen from the neighbourhood formed a committee "to investigate into the cases of those who have been seriously injured at the late meeting there" and raise a subscription for their medical and legal costs.[14] Chartist distrust of Robert Peel's new police force was longstanding, as they were regarded as hostile to political reformers, and their 'move on' system of clearing 'loiterers' from the streets was seen as an attack by the middle class on working-class leisure and their right to use public space.[15] These tensions evidently broke out in the August 1842 meeting, at a period of intense political agitation.

The great meeting of April 1848 wasn't the first meeting on Kennington Common that year. On Monday 13th March, a large Chartist meeting was postponed from Trafalgar Square. The *Morning Chronicle* noted that Kennington Common was "the most convenient space beyond the boundary prescribed by act of Parliament for holding open air meetings during the sitting of the legislature."[16]

There is no direct evidence in the papers in London Metropolitan Archives that the park was enclosed in reaction to the Chartist meeting of 10th April 1848, but it came at a time when local property-owning residents were putting pressure on the authorities to 'civilise' the space.

Kennington Common becomes a Public Park

There were no official 'public parks' before the 1840s anywhere in Britain. The Royal Parks in London such as Regent's Park were not fully accessible to the public and usually charged for entry, as did the pleasure gardens at Vauxhall. As London's development increased rapidly, access to open space decreased. Local and national authorities tried to regulate and control public behaviour in public spaces for the good of the community by clamping down on crime and to encourage a fit and healthy population by

13 *Northern Star,* 27 August 1842
14 *Northern Star,* 3 September 1842
15 David Goodway, *London Chartism 1838-1848,* Cambridge University Press, 1982
16 *Morning Chronicle,* 14 March 1848

'rational recreation' such as walking and playing organised games. In 1833, a parliamentary committee lamented the lack of 'public walks' available for working people to enjoy. The report proposed the laying out and planting round the edge of Kennington Common of a 'handsome public Walk.'[17]

In response to the September 1830 meeting, the Steward of the Manor of Kennington had vowed to "resist any attempt to bring waggons or any other kinds of carriages upon the Common, the entrances to which, with the exception of the foot ones, have been closed."[18] So, well before the 1852 enclosure, access had already been restricted. By 1825, the site had been surrounded by a waist-high wooden fence,[19] like the one shown in Harwood's 1842 engraving of the Common.[20]

In 1851, the minister of St Mark's Church, Reverend Charlton Lane, led a deputation to the government and the Duchy of Cornwall, requesting a park. The Common was enclosed by the 1852 Inclosure Act and public subscription raised the cost of £3,650 to lay out the Park. The design of the typical Victorian public park encouraged promenading and admiring formal floral displays, rather than the more rough and ready amusements associated with the Common. With the Park patrolled by wardens, locked at night, and regulated by copious bye-laws, authorities enforced their vision of polite and civilised recreation.[21] The last public debate attempted on the Common, a group of preachers "arguing upon their different religions," was turned away by police on 5th March 1854 and Kennington Park opened to the public later that month.[22]

Victorian public parks kept public space open and available to all classes, and were a welcome response to industrial and urban encroachment. But they also reflected the imposition of Victorian values of 'rational recreation' on residents, who were meant to use the parks in the restrictive ways that trustees and wardens wanted. Many councils did allow political meetings in their parks, but only upon prior application for permission.

17 *Morning Post,* 7 August 1833
18 *London Courier,* 27 September 1830
19 Survey of London, vol 26, Lambeth: Southern Area
20 See Fig. 3 on p.13
21 Conway, *People's Parks,* p.16

During the 1857 election, the candidates for the borough of Lambeth were nominated at a hustings held in the Park.[23]

In the twentieth century, the St Agnes Place squatters' case, where squatting residents challenged the Conservative council about the demolition of their street in 1977, reflected the continued conflicts over uses of space in the area.[24] In the 1980s, Kennington Park again became a central site of political gathering in south London. It was used for, among others, an Anti-Apartheid rally in 1984, Gay Pride from 1986 onwards, a CND Festival in 1987 and an Anti-Poll Tax march in 1990.[25] This modern activism restored its legacy as an important site of peaceful protest.

The story of Kennington Common and Park reflects, in microcosm, the history of public protest, and the enclosure and preservation of public space in Britain.

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22 Marie P G Draper, *Lambeth's Open Spaces: an historical account,* Lambeth, 1979, p.22
23 See engraving of the 1857 election hustings on pp.32-33
24 Szczelkun, *Kennington Park*
25 Szczelkun, *Kennington Park*

Back to the Land:

Findings of the Kennington Chartist Project research group

by Marietta Crichton Stuart

"... hunger for a new life,
intense and unconfined"

Described variously as utopian, heroic and harebrained, the Chartist Land Company of 1846-51 aspired to grant self sufficiency, in the countryside, to industrial and urban workers. At a time when only those those with land or property could vote, the scheme was also a way of empowering workers. It appealed to thousands of people, including hundreds in the London boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark. This is their story.

After 1839, support for Chartism in London grew. At its peak Lambeth had six branches and Southwark five. There were meetings in pubs such as the Montpelier Tavern in Walworth and the French Horn in Lambeth Walk; in coffee houses like Westbrook's in Waterloo Road and the Eagle in Guildford Street, and in the Chartist hall on Blackfriars Road. It culminated of course in the great Chartist rally on Kennington Common on the 10th April 1848.

The Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor, launched the Land Company in 1846. They bought land, then mortgaged it to buy more land. In all, they bought five tracts in Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire and Worcestershire. They renamed one Charterville, and another O'Connorville. The sites were laid out in two- to five-acre plots, each with a cottage. The *Northern Star* actively promoted the scheme, inviting people to buy shares at £1 6s (£1.30p). This was equal to the average weekly wage of a London labourer, and worth over £100 today. Payment could be in instalments of as little

◀ Lambeth and Southwark subscribers to the Chartist Land Plan. Map © OpenStreetMap contributors. Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 licence

as 3d (1.5p) a week – about £1 today. Once the subscribers were fully paid up, they were eligible to go into a ballot where names were drawn. If you were lucky in the ballot, you obtained a plot to rent and a large loan to cover set-up costs. People flocked to buy shares and 600 local offices had to be set up to collect the money. The difficulty for the scheme was that the law was not sufficiently flexible to permit such a lottery. In two years the Company had five different names and four sets of rules, and remained borderline unlawful. But this didn't seem to deter either O'Connor or the thousands who bought shares.

The handwritten share registers of the Land Company, in the National Archives at Kew, list up to 43,000 shareholders. Recently, author and historian Peter Cox and his University of the Third Age colleagues transcribed 1836 records from the London area. From that, Kennington Chartist Project volunteers extracted 283 names of people who lived in what are now the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark and cross-checked them against the census returns.

Lambeth and Southwark, with 267 male and 16 female subscribers, make up about 7 percent of the London total. Bermondsey was a major centre for the leather industry and about a quarter of the male subscribers, living in crowded terraced houses close to the Thames, worked in leather as 'cordwainers'. A further 30 or so worked in the wood trade. South London was rapidly developing, and about 25 were builders. Similar numbers were shopworkers, or worked in fabric, making and mending clothes. Another fifteen made brushes, gloves or pipes. But just as many worked in more rural occupations such as gardeners and flax dressers. Print and book production occupied seven, while only five were professional or clerical, including one schoolmaster. About 40 of the men were unskilled labourers. There were several unusual occupations – a fiddler, a painter in watercolours, and Richard Sewell of White Cottages, Lambeth who described himself as 'gent.' And some were long forgotten jobs – whalebone dresser, wire weaver, and butterman.

Half of the 16 female subscribers worked in making and mending clothes and some were 'Mantua makers' (dressmakers). Whilst one quarter were in no paid occupation, two women were laundresses and one was a coffee house keeper. Fifteen of the names were of minors whose parents

Back to the land: Findings of the KCP research group

bought shares on their behalf – Charles Smith of Commercial Road, Lambeth, a sawyer, bought shares for himself and his children George and Edward. In some cases, several family members were subscribers, notably the Side family of Southwark (see p.44). The three Lewis brothers of Neckinger Street, Bermondsey were makers of clay pipes. Father and son, James and Henry Rhodes, a dairy man and a carpenter, were from Kennington's Chester Street.

What made people apply? The hope of a better, healthier life? Being their own boss? An investment for the future? Whatever their motivation, the majority had little experience of the kind of work required to make a living from a two-acre plot. The scheme underestimated the challenges, assuming a high level of self-subsistence from the start. Things began to go wrong. Many people mistakenly thought they had purchased the freehold of the land and then struggled to repay the capital loan plus the rent. On some sites the soil wasn't suitable, and there were issues of access to water, roads and markets. Bermondsey tailor, John Gathard, (see p.45) spectacularly fell out with Feargus O'Connor and ended up in prison.

By 1851, the Land Company had laid out only 281 plots over the five sites. A Parliamentary Select Committee concluded it would take 115 years to settle the full Chartist Land Company membership on the land. The company was wound up in acrimony and the land sold. Many lost their hard-earned savings and, by then, many of the original plot holders had given up the battle to make a living from the land. Some emigrated while others moved from one low paid job to another.

We researched the lives of several of the local Land Company subscribers in more detail:

Charles Bubb, clerk, Trafalgar Street, Walworth Common

His 1898 obituary in the *South London Press* read: "A veteran whose life had been filled to the brim with political and social activities. This was none other than Charles Bubb, the Chartist, who died at the age of 91, and a large part of whose career was spent in endeavouring to ameliorate the condition of his fellow man... He could tell many a stirring tale of the Chartist movement and the agitation for electoral reform ... The great gathering upon Kennington Common, at which he was present, was

frequently a theme of pardonable enthusiasm with the old man ....”

The son of a cabinet maker, Charles Bubb was deeply involved with the Chartists, sitting on national committees. He was a generous donor and active campaigner. Speaking at a rally for residential manhood suffrage in the 1860s he said: “I am a working man and a thorough working man’s friend.” He served on several local government committees. In the 1861 census he recorded himself as a ‘householder’ and later as ‘a gentleman.’

Emily and William Jones, minors, 2 Ferndal Street, Grange Road, Bermondsey

The young children of William and Elizabeth Jones. William senior was a tailor, a trade that made up nearly 9 percent of the London Chartists. Eight of the Lambeth and Southwark Land Company subscribers were tailors. In the 1841 census, the Jones family was living in a multi-occupation building with Elizabeth’s mother. William was 30 and Elizabeth 25, daughter Emily was two and son William just two weeks old. By 1851, William had died and his widow was working as a school mistress. Nine-year-old William Jr was a scholar, but Emily, now 12, was described as ‘at home’, possibly taken out of school. Ten years on Elizabeth’s occupation was a day school governess. Young William, age 20, was an articled stationer’s clerk. Emily was described as ‘Wilemma E Jones,’ unmarried, aged 22, a ‘lady’s maid.’

The Side Family, school slate manufacturers, 5 Pepper Street, Union Street, Southwark

Robert Side and three of his sons, Alfred, Robert Henry and Walter, were active in the Lambeth, Walworth and national Chartist movement. They were shareholders, committee members and officers of the local Land Company. In 1864, Robert Sr was a co-signatory, together with Karl Marx, on a letter of congratulations to Abraham Lincoln after his re-election as US President.

Robert Sr had no fewer than 18 children and was a bit of an entrepreneur. He designed an ‘energy enhancing machine’ which his sons took to the United States. Alfred became a school teacher and was ward secretary for the Southwark Conservatives. Walter left the family slate business and, by 1871, was a mat maker. Robert Henry was at one

time land agent for the Land Company. By 1861 he described himself as a ‘General Dealer’, then a grocer and finally a house agent. By the mid 1880s he and five members of the Side family were active in the Newington and Walworth Liberal and Radical Association. He died in 1922 aged 98, seventy years after the 1848 Chartist rally on Kennington Common.

John Gathard, tailor, Page’s Walk, Grange Road, Bermondsey

John was an active Chartist lecturer and founder of the Lambeth branch of the Chartist Land Company. In 1846 he won a four-acre plot in the ballot at Charterville in Oxfordshire, plus a cottage, a £30 start up loan and moderate rent. He hoped he would ultimately own the freehold. But in 1848 his wife died, and he was left with three young children. A benefit concert was proposed so that he “could take possession of his Chartist hoe unencumbered with pecuniary difficulties ...” There were 78 allotments at Charterville and, as one of the overseers, Gathard came into conflict with Feargus O’Connor over the management of the scheme and the rights of the plot holders. It turned vicious. O’Connor’s newspaper, the *Northern Star,* described Gathard and his supporters as ‘idlers and drunkards’ and too lazy to reap their crops. They were evicted from their plots and had to pay costs. Gathard and two others couldn’t pay and the 1851 census records them in Oxford Castle jail. Gathard believed this was all instigated by O’Connor. He returned to life as a tailor.

In October 1855, the *Croydon Chronicle and East Surrey Advertiser* described The National Land Company as a “magnificent but unfortunate scheme.” There were many reasons why the Chartist Land Plan came to be seen as such a ‘heroic failure.’ But as Richard John writes: “The collapse of the Land Plan may have marked the end... but the appeal of ‘back to the land’ remained strong... Popular belief in land reform as a way of ensuring the prosperity of the working class endured.”[1]

1 **http://richardjohnbr.blogspot.com/2007/10/aspects-of-chartism-land-plan.html**

Further reading

Books

Chartism, Richard Brown
Chartism, A New History, Malcolm Chase
London Chartism 1838-1848, David Goodway
1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement, John Saville
William Cuffay, The Life and Times of a Chartist Leader, Martin Hoyles
Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1780-1848, Katrina Navickas

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The Springtime of the Peoples, Rob Pateman/Friends of Kennington Park
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Chartism in Lambeth – an introduction, Sean Creighton
Down with the Fences – Battles for the Commons in South London, Past Tense

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