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## **Rural Luddism and the makeshift economy of the Nottinghamshire framework knitters**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article explores the geography and culture of machine breaking in Nottinghamshire, home to the Luddite framework knitters. Earlier accounts have shed some light on why Luddism broke out in 1811-12; but they have had much less to say about why it assumed the form and the geography that it did. By situating Luddism in a longer chronological and broader historiographical context, the article suggests that it makes more sense when viewed as one of the last episodes in an older style of traditional and largely rural popular protest. Luddism in the region was a lot less moderate than previous accounts have argued, a reflection of the 'rough' culture of the knitters that thrived in the villages, a culture that has remained largely unexplored by historians. By utilising a range of sources that have been neglected in previous studies, notably parish and court records, and through a careful re-combing of the Home Office and Treasury Solicitors' files, this article recreates aspects of the day-to-day lives of the knitters, paying attention to poverty, life-cycle and crime. Luddism was about more than wages and working conditions; it was also a response to contractions in the 'makeshift economy'.

**KEYWORDS:** Protest; machine-breaking; poverty; crime; textile workers

In a letter, dated 14 January 1812, Thomas Boosey – member of the dynasty of musical instrument manufacturers – wrote to the Home Office enclosing a letter that he had received from a friend in Nottingham. The friend, whose name Boosey did not disclose, had drafted a letter to the editor of *The Times*, the subject of which was the Luddite disturbances then raging in Nottinghamshire. Fearing that publication ‘might endanger the lives of the family’, Boosey dissuaded his friend from sending the letter to *The Times*. However, believing it to contain astute insights into the disturbances, Boosey forwarded it on to Richard Ryder, the Home Secretary. Boosey’s friend emphasized the frustrations and helplessness felt by local authorities who were powerless to prevent the guerrilla-warfare tactics of the Luddites. This powerlessness was felt most acutely by the county magistrates who had jurisdiction over the villages and small townships surrounding Nottingham, and in some cases actually lived close by.<sup>1</sup>

In their haste to conclude that Luddism in Nottinghamshire was much more moderate than in Lancashire and the West Riding, historians have underestimated the level of the threat posed by the Nottinghamshire Luddites. Letters to and from the Home Office attest to the growing desperation of the authorities: the repeated augmentation of civil and military power; the fruitless offer of rewards and pardons; curfew; the dispatch of experienced Bow Street magistrates; the reluctance of hosiers to prosecute (from fear of retribution); the placing under military escort and civil protection of witnesses; the difficulties in apprehending Luddites and securing convictions, partly because of community

support, partly from fear; calls for martial law to be introduced; and the eventual enactment of legislation making frame-breaking a capital offence. All this was evidence of how the Luddites effectively rendered the knitting villages ungovernable to such an extent that, in the words of the Home Secretary, '900 cavalry and 1000 infantry were sent into Nottingham, which was a larger force than had ever been found necessary in any period of our history to be employed in the quelling of any local disturbance'.<sup>2</sup> While it would be a stretch to compare Nottinghamshire to the distant and inaccessible regions of South-East Asia that are the focus of anthropologist James C. Scott's book *The Art of Not Being Governed*, there are parallels in the ways that the 'friction of terrain' limited the reach and authority of the state. It was in the villages and small towns to the north of Nottingham where the epicentres of Luddism were to be found. Compared with Nottingham itself, these villages were akin to Scott's 'zones of relative autonomy'. While the state was eventually able to quell Luddism, the difficulties it experienced – due in part to geography – remind us that it was not just remote and upland peripheries where state power was limited.<sup>3</sup> Even the active figure of county authority, the Lord Lieutenant (the Duke of Newcastle), complained to the Home Office at the height of Luddism that 'unless information is sent me I may remain in perfect ignorance on these occasions of what is going on in the other end of the county'.<sup>4</sup>

The knitting villages were centres of hosiery manufacture, principally framework knitting, still organised on the domestic 'putting out' system. These were liminal communities – part rural, part urban; outside of, but connected through various networks to, one another, Nottingham and beyond that, the

region. The lonely hosiers and master knitters of the villages found themselves victims of some of the most daring and violent Luddite attacks. While the authorities in Nottingham were quick to complain of the supineness of some of the county magistrates, Boosey's friend, however, had a more sympathetic understanding of their position: 'Should the County magistrates exert themselves, then it becomes obvious that it must be at the evident hazard of their property. Cutting up Plantations, Burning Hay and Corn Stacks, Houghing Cattle & Horses, &c. would be the prelude to more serious depredations'.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps unbeknown to Boosey's friend, by the time he put pen to paper most of these hazards were already accompanying Luddism.

That frame breaking was accompanied by these hazards calls into question the conventional view that Nottinghamshire Luddism was concerned only with the immediate industrial grievances of the knitters.<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Thomis argued that there was no connection between Luddism in the region and other contemporary forms of popular disturbance and social/protest crime such as food riots, arson, theft and poaching.<sup>7</sup> As this article will show, historians have been too quick to present Nottinghamshire Luddism as a narrowly focused and largely peaceful movement. Linked to this interpretation is the view that Luddism was an extension of trades unionism by other (violent) means.<sup>8</sup> Carl Griffin has recently argued that machine breaking cannot be 'squarely rooted in older, agrarian models of protest' on account of the 'central role of trades unionism...and protestors' recourse to the law'.<sup>9</sup> However, neither trades unionism nor recourse to the law were central features in the villages (in marked contrast to Nottingham town). The differences between village knitters

and those in Nottingham, including their repertoires of protest, underscores the need to pay greater attention to the places and spaces in which Luddism occurred.<sup>10</sup> Conventionally, Luddism has been interpreted as an urban-industrial movement. Earlier accounts have failed to distinguish adequately between the quite different worlds of the village knitters from that of their counterparts in Nottingham who tended to be better paid, more organised and more law-abiding than the villagers.<sup>11</sup> This is not to suggest that the urban-industrial lens is wholly inappropriate. It has done much to tell us about the many grievances of the knitters: the use of un-apprenticed labour ('colts'), the proliferation of cheap, mass produced garments ('cut-ups'), frame rents, truck, and so on. Both E. P. Thompson and Malcolm Thomis in their very different ways tell us much about the *timing* of Luddism. For Thompson, Luddism was a response to the abrogation of paternalist legislation and the eclipse of the moral economy, while Thomis views machine breaking as a frustrated reaction to the devastating impact of the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>12</sup> Yet the urban-industrial lens does little to explain *why* some knitters took to breaking frames at all; just as the specific grievances of the knitters can only be made to explain so much as none of these complaints were new in 1811. Only by paying greater attention to the places and spaces in which Luddism took place, and through a fuller reconstruction of the world-view of the knitters, can we begin to answer this question.

Luddism took much of its character from the rural communities in which it flourished. This article takes up, but pushes further, Katrina Navickas' argument, based on her study of northern Luddism, that the movement 'was not

a solely urban phenomenon'.<sup>13</sup> For the Luddites of the Nottinghamshire villages, protest acts in the fields, woods and by-ways were intimately linked to machine breaking due to the contraction of the 'makeshift economy' practised by the knitters. Defined as the 'patchy, desperate and sometimes failing strategies of the poor' to make ends meet, the makeshift economy of the knitters was contracting in the years preceding Luddism, due primarily to enclosure, low levels of poor relief, rising cost of living, and falling wages.<sup>14</sup> We still know relatively little about the world-view of the East Midlands Luddites, or indeed about the culture of the framework knitters, and what little we do know is limited to the literate minority who tended to be better paid knitters like Joseph Woolley, who was not a Luddite: in good times Woolley was edging towards one pound a week, with the bulk coming from knitting, nearly three times the earnings of a knitter in the coarser branches of the trade (around two-thirds of knitters worked in the coarser branches).<sup>15</sup> In her recent study of Woolley's autobiography, Carolyn Steedman – following Kevin Binfield – implies that it is only through linguistic and rhetorical analysis that historians can restore agency and subjectivity to the Luddites, and by extension that it was only through their speech and writing that Luddites made clear their grievances and problems. As David Hopkin has argued in his study of nineteenth-century French plebeians, the problem with relying on 'ego-documents' such as autobiographies and diaries is that this genre is not representative of the wider working class, especially the poor, as these authors 'were more likely to be male, old, literate and urban, whereas the population as a whole was more female, young, illiterate and rural'.<sup>16</sup> In short, we need to know more about the Luddite rank and file. This was a culture that could be rough, though in using this term the intention is

not to define and measure it against some respectable other. The purpose here is to restore a sense of agency, subjectivity, meaning and motive to those Luddites who probably did not pen poems, songs, or elaborate pseudo-legalistic statements, but who did break frames, engage in 'criminal' activities, such as poaching and arson, and commit violence of one form or another.

### **The geography of Luddism**

Frame breaking commenced in the village of Arnold in March 1811 and then in the following weeks spread to the surrounding villages. Frame breaking then largely ceased for the duration of summer, mainly because the targeted hosiers came to terms with the demands of the knitters for a restoration of the old, agreed prices, but also – as the two Bow Street magistrates sent to Nottingham reported to the Home Office – because 'as the summer advances the season will encrease [sic.] the comforts of the poor, and the short nights will lessen the opportunity for mischief'.<sup>17</sup> Luddism in the East Midlands was invariably a winter activity. It then returned in October with greater intensity before dying out once again in February 1812, at which point Luddism spread to the West Riding of Yorkshire and Lancashire. There were further episodes of frame breaking throughout the East Midlands down to 1817, yet these were occasional episodes and never reached the intensity of the 1811-12 period.

Although Luddism would eventually spread to Derbyshire and Leicestershire it was always a predominantly Nottinghamshire-based movement (see Appendix). Of the 151 reported Luddite incidents that occurred in the first



and second phase of Luddism – March–April 1811 and October 1811–February 1812 – only twenty-seven (eighteen per cent) took place outside of Nottinghamshire. As several contemporaries were quick to observe, when Luddism came to Derbyshire and Leicestershire it was in those villages and towns that were contiguous and/or connected with Nottinghamshire.<sup>18</sup> William Felkin, the unrivalled authority on the East Midlands hosiery trade, recalled of this period that Nottingham hosiers rented out frames in several villages across the East Midlands.<sup>19</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that the frames targeted by the Luddites in Derbyshire belonged to unpopular Nottingham-based hosiers. Further, it was the prompt concessions of the Derby hosiers just over a week after frame breaking commenced in Derbyshire which had the effect of containing Luddism largely to villages close to the Nottinghamshire border.<sup>20</sup> Similar observations were made of Leicestershire.<sup>21</sup>

The geographical distribution of Luddite attacks formed a kite-shaped pattern, mostly to the north-west of Nottingham, stretching from Mansfield in the north to Loughborough in the south. The paucity of evidence makes it impossible to calculate the individual number of frames that were broken in each Luddite attack. If we take the two most intensive periods of Luddism, a more accurate calculation is to record the location of each *episode* of frame breaking, which can be pieced together from press reports and letters from local authorities to the Home Office (see Appendix). When analysed in this way, we can see that there were only five places which saw repeated episodes of frame-breaking, defined here as more than five separate episodes of frame breaking: Nottingham (sixteen episodes); Radford (sixteen); Basford (fifteen); Arnold

(eight); Bulwell (seven). With the exception of Nottingham, these places were all villages and small towns dotted around north-west Nottinghamshire – and these were all within a five mile radius. If we include all the places where occasional episodes of frame-breaking occurred, the small town and rural character of Nottinghamshire Luddism becomes even more apparent.

Randall and Charlesworth have argued that Luddism was just as strong, if not stronger, in Nottingham than in the surrounding villages.<sup>22</sup> Yet Nottingham itself seems under-represented: out of a total of 123 separate episodes of frame breaking in the county only sixteen were in Nottingham, though this is not that surprising given that only around twenty-five per cent of the total number of knitting frames in Nottinghamshire were in Nottingham itself.<sup>23</sup> During the initial phase of Luddism no frames were broken at all in the town. As late as January 1812 the Bow Street magistrates Conant and Baker, dispatched to Nottingham by the Home Office to lend assistance, reported ‘the fact is, that no very formidable outrages have ever taken place in the town, and from the beginning they have not been numerous’.<sup>24</sup> We might also note that when Luddism came to Nottingham some of the broken frames had been moved there from the outlying villages on the assumption that they would be less vulnerable to attack, which also suggests that some of those Luddites who broke frames in Nottingham may have come in from the surrounding villages.<sup>25</sup> Neither should we assume that knitters who lived in Nottingham necessarily worked for Nottingham hosiers; some of the hosiers lived and worked out of the villages, and it is probable that some employed knitters in Nottingham. This may explain why some of the Luddite discontent which issued from Nottingham

was directed at village hosiers.<sup>26</sup> Finally, it is worth recalling that Luddism commenced in the villages and not in Nottingham, even though the knitters had initially met in Nottingham market place. On at least two previous occasions, in 1779 and 1783, village knitters had poured into Nottingham to protest against wages and working conditions. When soldiers were called on to disperse the crowd the rioters left the borough and began to break frames in the surrounding villages, which shows that frame breaking was well established.<sup>27</sup> The Nottinghamshire knitters did not need the example of the West Country woollen workers to take up hammers against machinery.<sup>28</sup> So the decision of the assembled crowd to head for Arnold on 11 March 1811 was not unusual.

Though framework knitting was long established in the East Midlands, and had expanded considerably in the eighteenth century, the labelling of the knitting communities as ‘industrial’ is slightly misleading. While the demands, and during the good times, the pay, of framework knitting meant that few knitters combined their manufacture with part-time farming, many were still essentially rural artisans.<sup>29</sup> Most Luddites lived and worked in villages and broke frames in places of a similar size. The word village is entirely appropriate here: towns of this period are usually defined as places with more than 2500 people.<sup>30</sup> Table 1 shows the population (by parish) of the main Luddite centres. Whilst three villages each exceed 2500 these parish figures hide smaller constituent villages. The parish of Arnold, for example, in addition to Arnold also included the neighbouring villages of Daybrook and Redhill.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, by the early 1810s commentators were already distinguishing between the villages of Old and New Basford, and Old and New Radford.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, as the

comparative figures for 1801 suggest, the aggregate populations of Basford and Radford had only recently exceeded the urban threshold.

**[INSERT TABLE 1]**

If we take the places for which exact population figures exist (twenty-three of the twenty-eight places in the county that witnessed episodes of frame breaking), the population median is 1160. And if we discount those places which had parish populations of over 2500 but actually comprised smaller villages, of the reported 123 separate instances of frame breaking only 20 episodes occurred in places with populations over 2500 (sixteen in Nottingham, three in Sutton-in-Ashfield, and one in Mansfield). The percentage of families chiefly employed in agriculture is a further indication of the semi-rural character of the knitting villages (Table 2). It is instructive that, taken together, 22.4 per cent of families in these villages and towns were employed in agriculture, and in the Luddite 'hubs' of Arnold, Basford and Bulwell the combined figure is 27.7 per cent. The very low percentage for Radford probably reflects the fact that, of all the surrounding villages, it was much more in the orbit of Nottingham. With the partial exception of Radford, then, the knitting villages were not outlying neighbourhoods or townships of Nottingham: Basford, for example, was nearly three miles from the centre of Nottingham, Arnold and Bulwell were four miles.

**[INSERT TABLE 2]**

The character of Luddism was shaped in several ways by its rural context. If frame-breaking was the overwhelming weapon of choice, just under one-quarter of the total number of *reported* Luddite incidents come under the heading of ancillary protest acts (see Appendix), with one-half being acts of arson. During the second most intense period of Luddism – from October to February – the Luddites were more likely to set fire to something as they were to send a threatening letter (seventeen instances of arson versus fourteen threatening letters). Interestingly, in their immensely detailed chronicle of the disturbances, the two Bow Street magistrates, Conant and Baker, did not draw any distinction between frame-breaking and other contemporary disturbances.<sup>33</sup> During episodes of frame breaking in the knitting villages several stacks were burnt and ricks fired; a windmill was broken into and the machinery sabotaged; several barns and other farm buildings were set alight; and there is some evidence of Luddites uprooting hedge stakes (possibly for no other reason than as makeshift weapons, though acts of this kind were also part of popular resistance to enclosure).<sup>34</sup> In addition, there was arming, drilling, the robbery of arms, the exaction of financial contributions, posting of threatening letters and notices, intimidation and violence. The presence of all these acts (discounting machine breaking) in the Irish Rockite movement of the 1820s led its most recent historian to conclude that it was ‘manifesting the classic signs of a serious...agrarian movement’.<sup>35</sup> In an English context, machine breaking would soon become a classic sign of agrarian protest as demonstrated in the

‘Bread or Blood’ riots of 1816 and in the Swing movement of the early 1830s. In short, the Nottinghamshire framework knitters were employing the tools of rural terror. By contrast, with the exception of threatening letters, these ancillary protests acts were largely absent in Nottingham itself.

Nottinghamshire was no stranger to such traditional forms of protest: as late as 1800 there had been food rioting in the villages around Nottingham with attacks on property and persons, the levying of forced contributions and theft.<sup>36</sup> As we saw with Boosey’s letter to the Home Office, these protests acts were often avenging and designed to punish those who were known opponents of the Luddites or those who were deemed to be exploitative and charging exorbitant prices, such as farmers, millers and corn factors.<sup>37</sup> Some contemporaries attributed the recommencement of Luddism in October 1811 to the poor harvest, while the local corn prices had been particularly high in the month preceding the initial outbreak in March.<sup>38</sup> This suggests that there *was* an element within Nottinghamshire Luddism that, like its northern counterparts, was concerned with the price of food (*pace* the claims of Thomis).<sup>39</sup> When food rioting broke out in Nottingham market place on 7 September 1812, two of the female ring leaders were dubbed ‘Madam Ludd’ and ‘Lady Ludd’, thus symbolically linking their protest with Luddism.<sup>40</sup> True, the evidence is suggestive rather conclusive, but it would be highly unusual had no connection existed given the long and recurring outbreaks of food riots in and around Nottingham in the second half of the eighteenth century, in which framework knitters had been regular participants.<sup>41</sup> This intertwining of food riots with other forms of protest,

including machine breaking, is consistent with findings for the north-west of England.<sup>42</sup>

Descriptions of Luddites also betrayed the rural dimensions of the movement. In a number of depositions from those who witnessed or took part in Luddite attacks, there are references to the rustic clothing of the Luddites. Several describe Luddites wearing smock-frocks and corduroy trousers, though one witness implied that this was being done as a deliberate act of disguise.<sup>43</sup> Other sources confirm that the 'smock frock was commonly worn' by knitters down to the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, we know that the more well-to-do knitters like Joseph Woolley wore more expensive and fashionable garments, including 'fine shirts' and breeches.<sup>45</sup> The secret files of the Home Office also reveal that the government was particularly exercised about reports of Nottinghamshire Luddites being well-dressed and well-financed, which it took as evidence of outside support and thus instructed the Nottingham post office to watch for communication with 'disaffected persons in some of the large towns of the kingdom'.<sup>46</sup> The Nottinghamshire authorities were understandably desperate to lay the blame for Luddism on outside forces, including Napoleon, yet Conant and Baker were unable to find a shred of substantiating evidence.<sup>47</sup> Dressing in traditional costume was a long established device used by protestors in Britain and Ireland to effect disguise and clothe oneself in the legitimacy of folk custom.<sup>48</sup> In addition to clothing, there were other traces of English rural culture. Scholars of folklore and rural customs have pointed to some of the parallels between folkplays and Luddism, especially the ritualised performances associated with 'mumming': such as

cross-dressing, the use of disguises, especially blackening of the face, by those who doled out ritual punishments to those who had offended communal norms, and by levying contributions on the community.<sup>49</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that the Nottinghamshire Luddites were conscious of these traditions. When one suspected Luddite was found in possession of a gun he had the wit to claim that he was keeping it for the plough bullock (or plough Monday) festival.<sup>50</sup> It did not escape the attention of Charles Sutton, the radical editor of the *Nottingham Review*, that when Luddism first commenced on 11 March 1811 it had been 'one of the great fair days'.<sup>51</sup> Likewise when it recommenced in the late autumn it was during the height of the festival calendar following the harvest (feast and fair days were often the occasion for protest acts).<sup>52</sup> Absence could also be just as revealing when it came to Luddite appropriations of popular custom. When Shrove Tuesday came round in February 1812, the authorities were struck by the absence of the usual festivities. Conant and Baker reported to the Home Office that 'Shrove Tuesday has by long custom been a day in which the common people collected themselves together in great numbers and indulged in violent and boisterous sports, especially about the Forest'.<sup>53</sup> By refusing to participate in this calendric rite, the community was sending a message to the authorities of just how desperate times were.

In a related fashion, Luddite humour also recalled the revelry of popular custom and the 'world turned upside down'. Luddism has been presented as a serious business, and for good reason: frame breaking was made a capital offence in March 1812, and prior to this it had been a transportable offence.<sup>54</sup> Yet on occasions Luddites could be humorous - deliberately so, perhaps, such as



when a party of Luddites from Arnold put the remains of one broken frame in the village stocks, or when Luddites at Basford fastened parts of a broken frame to the roof of the local prison.<sup>55</sup> Both were instances of Luddites taunting the authorities, of subverting the 'official' use of particular spaces.<sup>56</sup> This is not to suggest that Luddism was merely an extension of rural revelry. As Bushaway has observed of Captain Swing, in breaking machines the rioters 'had stepped beyond the bounds of custom', but they had, nevertheless, 'adapted its mechanism for use in more direct forms of behaviour.'<sup>57</sup> By appropriating the ritualised behaviour associated with folk tradition the Luddites were legitimizing their actions by demonstrating to the authorities that they had rite and might on their side.

### **Luddism in the village**

Why were knitters in the villages more prone to Luddism? Various explanations have been suggested. Church and Chapmen, in a famous philippic against E. P. Thompson's interpretation of Nottinghamshire Luddism, attributed this to the geographical distribution of the various branches of the hosiery trade. While the lower paid, plain or coarse branches of framework knitting were concentrated in the villages, the finer and better paid branches – including the new and rapidly emerging lace trade – clustered in Nottingham. Church and Chapman argued that the violence of the villages was to be explained by the more extreme poverty of the village knitter.<sup>58</sup> While there is some truth in this, geographical distribution can only be made to explain so much. Most villages had frames that were employed in both branches of the trade, and Nottingham itself was no

different even if there was a greater concentration of finer branches.<sup>59</sup> Church and Chapman were correct, however, to distinguish between Nottingham and the villages as relations between hosiers and knitters were generally more strained in the latter. This was due to the greater role played by middlemen, or 'bag hosiers' as they were known, who were contracted by merchant hosiers in Nottingham to distribute and collect work from the knitters in the villages, which gave considerable scope to 'buy cheap and sell dear'.<sup>60</sup> Yet this must also have been the case in Nottingham, too. With hundreds of small workshops in the town hosiers still relied on middlemen to organise what was a still a complex system of sub-contracting before the age of the large hosiery factory after mid-century. According to Felkin's calculations for the *Factories Inquiry Commission* of 1833, half of the fully wrought garments and two-thirds of the 'cut-ups' passed through the hands of middlemen.<sup>61</sup> So the organisation of the hosiery trade only gets us so far in explaining the geography of Luddism.

A more compelling explanation for the check on frame breaking in Nottingham has to be the higher risks that were involved, due in large part to the nature of the built environment. Nottingham was much more compact and easier to police than the villages. While there may have been more alleyways, 'nooks and crannies' in which to disappear, there was increased risk of capture, and not just because of the greater concentration of the forces of law and order. In the villages it was common for a knitters' workshop to be on the ground floor of a two-storey building; but in Nottingham they were more often three storey buildings with the workshop on the top floor.<sup>62</sup> This meant it was more difficult to gain access to the town workshops, and there was always the risk of Luddites

being trapped in the upper storey: indeed, some had to effect swift and dangerous exits over rooftops.<sup>63</sup> The lower density of the villages thus worked to the advantage of the Luddites. As George Sculthorpe, clerk to the county magistrates, informed the Home Office on 13 November: 'The disturbances have at present prevailed chiefly in the County, because the population being there dispersed the property cannot be so well defended.'<sup>64</sup> Once the authorities had mobilised the forces of law and order by the end of 1811 Nottingham soon resembled a garrison town: Felkin recalled how 'Nottingham seemed as if in a state of siege'.<sup>65</sup> In their report to the Home Office, Conant and Baker attributed the relative calm in Nottingham to the better policing of the town.<sup>66</sup>

By contrast, in the villages surrounding Nottingham, despite the posting of small detachments of troops,<sup>67</sup> Luddites struck with virtual impunity. The knitting villages were surrounded by fields, woods and forests – all ideal places from which to launch Luddite attacks and safe places to hide after an attack. There were numerous instances of Luddites massing on Bulwell Forest before marching off to the selected target, while 'Ned Ludd's office' was famously based in Sherwood Forest. Luddites also used the forests to plan their attacks, practice their marksmanship, and as hide-outs.<sup>68</sup> A number of the villages – Basford, Bulwell, Hucknall Torkard – were linked together by the River Leen as well as by roads; the latter, for obvious reasons, being much less safe for fleeing Luddites. Machine breakers also evaded capture by using rivers.<sup>69</sup> Occasionally frames were ritually drowned in rivers (as well as frames and spurious garments being burnt), both favourite tactics of machine breakers in France.<sup>70</sup> The authorities believed that Luddites were planning to destroy some of the canals

in the area as a means of disrupting trade and thus putting more pressure on the authorities and hosiers, further evidence of how the Luddites made the geography of the countryside work for them.<sup>71</sup>

The physical layout of the village also lent itself to the guerrilla-warfare tactics of the Luddites. Conant and Baker reported to the Home Secretary that by December of 1811 the Luddites were selecting 'lone or detached houses'.<sup>72</sup> The parish and special constables were simply overwhelmed. As Lord Middleton (of Wollaton Hall, which was close to the knitting villages of Radford) explained to the Home Office:

Many constables have been sworn in...and I believe they are disposed to act firmly, but these men living in detached houses, and many in straggling villages, would easily be prevented from uniting together in cases of alarm, which makes it particularly pressing in my humble opinion, that small military escorts, should be so stationed, as to enable the well disposed [sic.] to get together for general co-operation.<sup>73</sup>

Even when small detachments of troops were placed in villages they tended to remain together and obviously could not be everywhere at once. So it was possible for Luddites to break frames in properties that, in some cases, were literally a stones through away from the civil and military forces and in the time that it took for them to reach the scene the Luddites had disappeared into fields under the cover darkness (the villages were also less well-lit than

Nottingham).<sup>74</sup> Before soldiers were stationed in the villages it had been even easier for Luddites to attack. As communication was by word of mouth, if Luddites sprung surprise attacks and established a guarded perimeter around the village they could prevent word from getting to the authorities. This was how Luddites had conducted attacks at Blidworth and Beeston.<sup>75</sup>

A number of the Luddite hubs were relatively close to one another, which explains why Luddites were able to move between the villages with relative ease. Gunfire shots were used to communicate with Luddites in neighbouring villages.<sup>76</sup> During the second phase attacks took place on the same night in multiple locations, possibly simultaneously, such as the attacks at Beeston, Blidworth and New Radford on 29 November.<sup>77</sup> At the very least, this suggests that Luddism was not carried out by a single group ‘who moved rapidly from village to village’.<sup>78</sup> We know that the one big ‘job’ at Sutton-in-Ashfield on 13 November 1811 brought together Luddites from several different villages – often several miles away.<sup>79</sup> Smaller jobs also brought machine breakers together from several villages. Framework knitters tended to be quite a mobile group of workers. Some knitters in the outlying villages still made regular trips into Nottingham – to cut out the middle-man – to deliver their finished goods and collect raw material in person, calling at pubs and inns: depositions make it clear that this was one of the ways in which some knitters were co-opted into Luddism.<sup>80</sup> Poor law records for Basford also reveal that knitters moved villages to find employment.<sup>81</sup> Ties of kinship also linked the villages: it was during a visit to his parents’ home in Basford that the Arnold Luddite William Burton was enlisted by James Towle’s brother for the famous Loughborough job on 28

June 1816 when Nottinghamshire Luddites, led by Towle, attacked Heathcote and Bodin's Mill.<sup>82</sup> Framework knitters were 'not bound by their insular village lives'.<sup>83</sup>

### **Luddite violence**

As Carl Griffin has argued in relation to the Swing Riots, given the endemic nature of violence in plebeian communities, it would be extraordinary had the rioters shied away from violence in all its forms.<sup>84</sup> When the focus is shifted on to the villages, Nottinghamshire Luddism appears much less moderate and restrained than previous accounts have suggested. According to these interpretations, the Luddites of the East Midlands were wedded to a tradition of constitutional reform, a constitutionalism that stemmed from the grant of a royal charter to the framework knitters by Charles II in 1663, which, amongst other things, had regulated apprenticeships and empowered members to fine those who manufactured spurious work and even to destroy 'shoddy' goods. For Binfield and Steedman, it is the weight of this constitutional tradition that explains the legalistic language used by the Luddites of the East Midlands in their threatening letters along with their willingness to use peaceful methods like petitioning parliament.<sup>85</sup> The personification of this moderate constitutionalism is Gravener Henson, Nottingham framework knitter and indefatigable campaigner for the rights of trades unions, who, parallel to the Luddism taking place in Nottinghamshire, was working to secure parliamentary legislation to protect the framework knitters. Thompson famously speculated that Henson's campaign seemed so closely intertwined with Luddism, with the

one strategy giving way to the other so suddenly, that 'it is possible that both were directed – at least up to 1814 – by the same trade union organisation, in which perhaps Luddites and constitutionalists (probably led by Gravener Henson) differed in their counsels.'<sup>86</sup> To be fair to Thompson, we should note the circumspection of his language here, though his main detractors – Church and Chapman – have been less generous. Nonetheless, Church and Chapman were right to be sceptical of any connection between Luddism and the constitutional campaign, even if, as we saw in the previous section, they arrive at this conclusion for the wrong reasons.

It seems unlikely that village knitters were taking orders from some central directing Luddite cell in Nottingham. Luddism seems to have been organised on a community basis: it was common in depositions and spy reports to note that certain villages participated whilst others did not.<sup>87</sup> While a great deal of violence was highly selective, Thompson certainly exaggerated the restrained and disciplined nature of Luddism in Nottinghamshire, a criticism that can also be levelled at more recent work.<sup>88</sup> Luddism in the villages was more of a spontaneous, riotous affair – at least in early phase of 1811-12 – organised, if not always executed, locally. While the decision to launch an attack might have been made by a small band of leaders, a number of contemporary accounts refer to the 'snowball' effect of Luddite recruitment, with the numbers growing as the crowd made its way through each village.<sup>89</sup> Although the actual number of men who broke frames may have been small, it was common for them to be accompanied by a crowd numbering in the low hundreds. Luddism was not invariably the work of 'smaller, disciplined bands, who moved rapidly

from village to village at night'.<sup>90</sup> Between March 1811 and February 1812 there were at least three reported instances of frame breaking involving upwards of 100 people, two instances involving 50-100, one involving 30-40 and three involving 10-20. Furthermore, there were at least eight episodes of frame breaking during daylight hours, which facilitated the transformation of small bands into crowds 'amounting frequently to 2 or 300'.<sup>91</sup> In Nottinghamshire there seems to have been a greater degree of variation in the number of men involved in Luddite attacks than was the case in the West Riding (at least according to Richard Jones, who claims that a Luddite attack typically involved between four and ten individuals).<sup>92</sup> In Nottinghamshire anything between six and sixty was common as Felkin recalled, and at the upper end we are clearly talking about riots.<sup>93</sup> As was the case in Lancashire, there is also some evidence of Luddite framework knitters trying to enlist the support of other workers, notably colliers (another group of rural industrial workers) and millworkers.<sup>94</sup> This hardly represented wishful thinking as there was a long tradition of knitters co-operating with colliers in food riots and other disturbances in the region.<sup>95</sup> While the vast majority of Luddite who were arrested were framework knitters, a small number were from other trades, including a bricklayer and a bleacher (the latter most likely a millworker), and one witness positively identified a worker from Robinson's cotton mill (in Arnold) as a frame breaker.<sup>96</sup> Conant and Baker were in no doubt that Luddism was a working-class movement: 'we are sorry to observe that almost every creature of the lower order both in town and country are on their side.'<sup>97</sup>



Thus, it was not hyperbole when the Nottinghamshire authorities referred to the Luddites as ‘rioters’ and a ‘lawless mob’.<sup>98</sup> As the Duke of Newcastle relayed to the Home Office on 2 December 1811, ‘The rioters sometimes collect in great numbers in the villages about Nottingham...’<sup>99</sup> The fact that Luddite attacks occurred on the same night in areas far apart suggests that the organization of Midlands Luddism was decentralised.<sup>100</sup> The view that Luddism was the work of a small band is also difficult to square with the fact that episodes of frame breaking could develop a momentum of their own, which no doubt explains why there were occasions when Luddite leaders and the rank and file were at odds with one another. There were instances of the rank and file exceeding their orders, by continuing to break frames during periods of negotiation with the hosiers, by indiscriminate frame breaking (as opposed to the targeted destruction of wide frames used to manufacture cut-ups of frames working below agreed prices), by stealing from those whose frames had been broken, and by using the money levied to pay for new clothes and drink at the pub.<sup>101</sup> Thus, if there was a central directing hand its control was far from absolute.

Perhaps the most damning evidence against there being much of a connection between Luddism and the constitutional wing is the relative weakness of trade unionism in the villages – at least in terms of the villages’ involvement in the Nottingham-based movement led by Henson. While there are good grounds for interpreting Luddism in the town as part of an ‘evolving history of trade unionism among the framework knitters’, village Luddism simply refuses to squeeze into this interpretative framework. The village knitters

were not 'heavily committed to constitutional reform and regulation of their trade'.<sup>102</sup> The petition that Henson and the Committee of Framework Knitters organised to accompany their appeal to parliament was signed by 2629 hands in the town of Nottingham while only 2078 signed from the rest of the entire county of Nottinghamshire, which, given its relative size, and the fact that the vast majority of frames were situated in the county, seems very low indeed. Hence the complaints by the Nottingham committee of the apathy and hostility of the village knitters.<sup>103</sup> The latter responded in kind. A delegate from Basford complained to Henson that the interests of the plain branches were being neglected and tellingy that the delegates who had been sent to London were 'lace and plain silk hands' – an assertion borne out by the dominance of their concerns in the subsequent report on framework knitting which appeared in 1812.<sup>104</sup> This is not to suggest that there was no unionism in the villages, but what existed was of a different kind than that centred around Henson. The village knitters, including the Luddites, may well have used the cover of friendly societies, of which there were many with high memberships in the villages.<sup>105</sup> Finally, it is also perhaps no coincidence that much of the legalistic and constitutional discourse that Binfield has detected in Nottinghamshire Luddism issued from lace rather than hosiery workers who tended to be concentrated in Nottingham. The lace trade was of much more recent origin, and generally workers were able to command higher wages. By the time that the second, most intense, phase of Luddism was drawing to a close, of the estimated 1000 frames broken 'very few indeed' were lace frames.<sup>106</sup>

There is, then, little evidence to support the view that Luddism in the villages was inhibited by constitutionalism, or indeed restrained by a directing hand in Nottingham. When Luddism was at its peak in the villages it was equal to the violence of the West Riding and Lancashire. That historians have underestimated the violent nature of Luddism is partly due to the distorting focus on Nottingham itself. It is also due to the conflation of the quite separate issues of Luddite aims and tactics. Virtually all accounts rightly conclude that political radicalism, much less revolutionary objectives, was not a prominent feature of Nottinghamshire Luddism in 1811-12.<sup>107</sup> Reading back from this conclusion, historians – notably Thompson and more recently Binfield – have conflated this with Luddite tactics: the limited goals of Luddism in Nottinghamshire somehow acted to moderate the tactics used by the Luddites (a similar point has been made about the absence of oath-taking in Nottinghamshire Luddism).<sup>108</sup> Yet this does not follow: protest movements can have very specific objectives but still represent a serious threat to the status quo. If Luddism in the Midlands was so restrained, then why did the local authorities and central government react in the way that they did? Hyperbole can only be made to explain so much. A number of historians have remarked on what they have perceived as the over-reaction of the authorities to the threat posed by the Luddites.<sup>109</sup> The response of the authorities begins to make more sense when one appreciates just how threatened the authorities and propertied classes felt. We have already seen how the Luddites were able to render the villages virtually ungovernable.

If one directs a magnifying lens over the villages, then Luddism appears anything but moderate or constitutional. Frames were broken (over 1000 frames, according to Felkin), windows were smashed, doors kicked in, blows exchanged, shots fired, cottages and workshops plundered with residents held at gun point, hosiers were sent threatening letters, police and soldiers were threatened and attacked, and a number of highway robberies were committed in the name of Ned Ludd, again often at gun point.<sup>110</sup> Even some of the Luddite texts that Binfield has singled out as exemplary of the use of legalistic and constitutional idioms threaten violence, even death.<sup>111</sup> Such incidents as these were common and were not merely the inventions of paranoid local elites served up to the Home Office with a view to securing more protection. Midlands Luddism may have lacked the dramatic equivalent of Rawfolds Mill (though the attack on Heathcoat and Bodin's Lace Mill at Loughborough surely comes close), and the assassination of William Horsfall but it was hardly bloodless. There were attempted assassinations of two hated Nottingham hosiers – William Trentham and Samuel Ash and of a local constable in New Radford, and of several witnesses who gave – or were to give – evidence against Luddites, while a woman in Mansfield who tried to prevent Luddites from breaking her frames was stabbed several times and left for dead.<sup>112</sup> The Midlands may not have hosted a special commission for trying Luddites with all the drama that that entailed at York in January 1813, but it had high profile trials, notably at the Nottingham Lent assizes in 1812 where seven men were found guilty and transported, and more famously at the Leicester Summer assizes in 1816 where seven men were tried, convicted and eventually executed for their part in the Loughborough job, which included an attempt on the life of workman guarding

the factory. The Nottingham authorities were so worried during the Lent Assizes of 1812 that the precedent of removing troops when the assize sat was overturned for fear of Luddite reprisals against judge and jury.<sup>113</sup> Fear of violent retribution also deterred witnesses from coming forward, even with the inducements of rewards.<sup>114</sup> On a number of subsequent occasions, Nottinghamshire Luddites were acquitted because the jury were intimidated.<sup>115</sup>

One final point in relation to Luddite violence needs to be emphasized. For all its propensity to ‘snowball’ into the riotous crowd, it was seldom mindless. Indeed, it was the orderly nature of the protest that so unnerved the authorities: as William Sherbrooke, county magistrate, relayed to the Duke of Newcastle, ‘The mob is now so organized that nothing but military placed in every parish will be adequate to suppress it’.<sup>116</sup> It was the psychological terror just as much as the machine breaking itself that unnerved the propertied classes – ‘under the real influence of terror’, in the words of the magistrates.<sup>117</sup> As recent work on protest, and on cultures of interpersonal violence, has made clear, violence can be a calculated response which serves well defined purposes.<sup>118</sup> In short, it can be no less calculating than the decision to petition parliament. Seen from this perspective, violence was a rational response to the predicament of the village knitters. In the absence of trades unionism and the constitutional reform, there were very few viable mechanisms for conflict resolution between knitters and hosiers. Allied to this, the dispersed nature of framework knitting, notwithstanding all the ties of kinship, neighbourhood and trade, made it difficult to organise the knitters for strikes, especially when there were many knitters who felt compelled to accept the less favourable terms of the

exploitative hosiers – by accepting lower piece-rates, by making ‘cut-up’ garments and even employing unapprenticed labour (‘colts’). It is always worth remembering that Luddism was just as much a war against fellow knitters as well as those who accepted their lots as it was against hosiers, a point not lost on the Duke of Newcastle. Newcastle was also aware that colts were often women who ‘in many instances’ took jobs ‘in which men had hitherto been employed’.<sup>119</sup> This was a fundamental challenge to the existing gendered division of labour practiced by knitting families with head males as knitters supported by wives and children (as a winder, seamer or chevener). Seen from this perspective, the targeted destruction of frames worked by women represented, like the subsequent Swing movement, ‘an assertion of an imperilled masculinity’.<sup>120</sup> In this context, destroying machines was a perfectly rational and highly effective response: it hurt not only the hosiers who owned the frames but also prevented knitters who accepted lower prices from working them. As well as providing an immediate solution to their predicament by forcing the hosiers to come to terms (which many did, at least for a time), frame breaking also drew public attention dramatically to the plight of the honourable knitter.

### **The contracting makeshift economy**

The violence of Nottinghamshire Luddism raises questions about who committed these acts of violence, and whether these acts were exceptional or part of a wider, rougher and criminal culture. Were Luddites otherwise unblemished, respectable, law abiding if degraded artisans? In a partial corrective to what he saw as Thompson’s overly romanticized view of the

Luddites, Thomis argued that as Luddism evolved it became more the preserve of a hardened, semi-professional criminal element. Once framebreaking was made a capital offence in spring 1812, Thomis reasoned, the stakes were raised and it ceased to be the community-based affair it had been. The fact that Towle and Co. all lived in villages to the north-west of Nottingham, or in Nottingham itself, and were hired for a job as far away as Loughborough (Basford to Loughborough is about twenty miles) seems, *prima facie*, evidence that machine breaking was now in the hands of specialist contractors. Thomis makes the assumption that the early Luddites had had genuine connections with framework knitting and were skilled, respectable craftsmen who were far removed from the criminal elements who came to dominate later Luddism.<sup>121</sup>

Leaving aside for one moment the vexed question of how to define criminal, this 'criminal element' had been there since the very beginning, hence the reference in confessions of Luddites caught in 1816-17 to 'old hands', 'Old Neds' or 'Old and most serious offenders'.<sup>122</sup> Towle himself, according to the authorities, 'has been a leader of the conspiracy from its first formation'.<sup>123</sup> In his confession Towle informed the authorities that his accomplice, Mitchell 'has been a leading Man amongst the Luddites ever since the Ludding business began' and 'Slater and Savage have also been old hands at it'.<sup>124</sup> It had also been common in 1811-12 for Luddites to carry out attacks that were some distance from where they lived and worked; and if we see machine breaking as a form of crime, there was nothing unusual in criminals 'travell[ing] considerable distances to commit their offences'.<sup>125</sup> The Duke of Newcastle informed the Home Office in December 1811 that the Luddites 'collect in great numbers in the

villages about Nottingham and march to a considerable distance where they commit what depredations they please and levy contributions'.<sup>126</sup> Thomis may well be right that hardened criminals took advantage of the Luddite disturbances in 1811-12 to commit crimes in the name of New Ludd, but to suggest that genuine Luddites had no connections with the criminal underworld underestimates just how 'rough' the culture of the framework knitters could be. A number of the ringleaders from the 1811-12 period who were rounded up at the time or subsequently were described as 'notorious characters', and had engaged in all manner of irreverent behaviour when breaking frames, such as stealing.<sup>127</sup> Though hardly a sympathetic voice but one that was well placed to observe, the Reverend J. T. Becher of Southwell in a long letter to the Home Office accused the knitters of a trilogy of vices - 'the discussion of politics, the destruction of game...[and] the dissipation of the alehouse'.<sup>128</sup> Likewise the clerical-magistrate Richard Hardy of Loughborough believed the Luddites to be '... thieves and poachers of all descriptions'.<sup>129</sup> We know that Luddites spent a good deal of time in alehouses, planning their jobs, and on occasions engaging in subversive drunken revelry by singing such songs as 'Damn the laws, and so say I'.<sup>130</sup>

An analysis of the Nottingham Quarter Session court records reveals a darker and visceral element to the lifestyle and culture of framework knitting. The existence of this strain is hardly surprising given how debased and sweated this trade had become. Figure 1 shows the crimes for which framework knitters were either indicted and/or convicted between 1803 and 1813.



**[INSERT FIGURE 1]**

Only three of the thirty-nine knitters were residents in Nottingham; the remainder were from the various villages. Each of these crimes attest to the tough and rough side of framework knitting. While poaching and theft might technically be illegal activities, how far these acts – including frame-breaking – were seen as illegal by the perpetrators and the wider community is a moot point. Given the privations experienced by the knitters, poaching, as John Archer notes, was ‘not viewed as criminal in any way by the labouring community’.<sup>131</sup> This is not just because it is an example of ‘survival crime’; killing animals to survive was seen as a ‘right’. How far Towle and Co. saw themselves as criminals, and were seen, as criminals is difficult to answer; and we should be wary of accepting at face value any gallows contrition. Clearly, they were not professional criminals in the sense of full-time offenders as they were knitters by trade.

Although thirty-nine is quite a small number over a ten year period, these figures are likely to significantly underestimate the number of framework knitters who were indicted. First, it was common for the clerk to simply enter ‘labourer’ under occupation.<sup>132</sup> Secondly, as Peter King has shown, the number of prosecutions which actually proceeded to trial represented a small proportion of the overall number of prosecutions, many of which were dropped for a whole raft of reasons.<sup>133</sup> In addition, knitters appear much more frequently in the court records for lesser offences, with, for example, knitters regularly appearing in court on bastardy charges and entering into recognizances to keep the peace,

especially towards one another, publicans and occasionally figures of authority such as game keepers, constables and clergymen. To take the year 1811 as an example, eleven framework knitters were ordered to pay maintenance to bastards, eight to keep the peace, three for assault charges, and two on charges of departing court without leave.<sup>134</sup> The relatively high number of poaching offences is significant, evidence that semi-rural Nottinghamshire was no stranger to the 'poaching wars' which escalated in the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>135</sup> It was the capture of a framework knitter and Luddite for an attack on the house of the game keeper of Lord Middleton in February 1817 which enabled the authorities to move against a cell of Luddites 'who have for so many years' evaded capture.<sup>136</sup> The Luddite-cum-poacher was one John Blackburn who, in a desperate attempt to save his own skin, turned king's evidence and implicated nine Luddite ringleaders who had participated in the attack on Heathcoat's Mill at Loughborough on 28 June 1816. This enabled the authorities to move against other members of Towle's band.

A memoir entitled 'Reollections of a Journey Stockinger, 1816', which came to light in 1985 when it was deposited in Nottinghamshire Archives, provides further evidence of the connections between Luddism and poaching. The author, who has been identified as Joseph Burdett of Lambley, claimed to have known Towle and his associates. The memoir provides a tantalizing glimpse into the world of the village knitter. We learn that Luddites from various villages came together to commit acts of frame breaking, that kinship was one of the links that bound Luddites together, that acts of stealing frequently accompanied acts of frame breaking, and that they also regularly

engaged in poaching which brought them into conflict with various game keepers.<sup>137</sup> The knitter was just as much at war with the landowner and the magistrate (often one and the same) as he was with the hosier.<sup>138</sup>

Village Luddites, then, were not semi-professional criminals divorced from their wider community. The fact that Luddism brought together men from different villages is not necessarily evidence of a rootless criminal band.

Depositions make clear that Luddites from different villages were linked by kinship, trade – such as working for the same bag hosier – and neighbourhood: knitters might work for different masters in different locations, but some lived in the same street and even the same building.<sup>139</sup> At least two other members of Towle's circle were linked by kinship: Chris Blackburn[e] was married to William Withers' sister and they lived with Withers' mother.<sup>140</sup> Chris and John Blackburn were brothers. Even some of those described as the 'worst of a bad set' were not hardened criminals. Judge Bailey was much struck by the good character of William Carnell, a Luddite convicted at the Lent Assizes in 1812 (though we might note that a William Carnell of Basford was indicted at the quarter sessions in 1807 for refusing to pay maintenance to a bastard child).<sup>141</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that at least some of the Luddites may have been religious men: the notorious John Dann, who had planned to assassinate George Coldham, the town clerk who oversaw the suppression of Luddism, and who was eventually convicted for highway robbery asked for a Particular Baptist minister to be present at his execution.<sup>142</sup> John Amos, one of Towle's co-conspirators in the Loughborough Job, sang John Wesley's hymn 'How sad our state by nature is' just before his execution.<sup>143</sup> Even Towle, who, it was claimed,

wanted ‘no parsons about him’ sang a hymn just before his execution. How far all this was ‘gallows piety’ is unknown. Certainly, there was no love lost between the Luddites and the Anglican hierarchy, not least because a number of clergymen doubled as magistrate such as Dr. Wylde, rector of St. Nicholas in Nottingham. Wylde forbid the Basford parish parson from officiating at Towle’s funeral, threatening him with defrocking (which suggests, at the very least, that the parson felt obligated, and may have been liked by the Luddites).<sup>144</sup>

A number of contemporary sources allude to the Luddites being young men. While this was – and is – often an assertion levelled by the authorities as a device for de-legitimizing protest, the evidence suggests that many of them *were* young (in their late teens or very early twenties), - those who were relatively new to the trade and, presumably, saw little prospect of making a successful career.<sup>145</sup> The mean age of the five Luddites convicted at the Lent Assizes in 1812 was eighteen.<sup>146</sup> Some Luddites had recently married and had young families. Three Luddite leaders from the 1811-12 period have been located in the parish marriage records: William Carnell, a twenty-one year old Luddite indicted for frame-breaking at Basford, and James Towle were married at Basford, respectively, on 22 March 1807 and 11 October 1807. By the time Towle and Co. were executed in 1817, some of them were in the early thirties, including Towle, yet they would have been in the mid-twenties when Luddism commenced.<sup>147</sup> John Westby, a young Luddite who was killed at Bulwell in November 1811, had married at Arnold on 30 November 1807, and he was buried at Arnold parish church. Westby’s wife, however, had died in the interim leaving him with two young children.<sup>148</sup> Thus, we can also infer that many would have been at a

particular vulnerable stage in the poverty cycle. The husband/father would not have reached their full earning potential (presuming, of course, that they were actually in employment). The earnings of his wife would have also been limited by the fact that she was most likely working for him and so her earnings were tied to his and at a time when the demands placed on her as a mother would have been most burdensome. The children would have been too young to be earning.<sup>149</sup> Take James Towle as an example. His first child, Priscilla, was born in 1808, his second, Ann, in 1811, his third, Sarah, in 1813, and his fourth in 1816.<sup>150</sup> Thus, during the period of Luddite activity – 1811-16 – he probably had three, if not four, children who were too young to be earning and a wife who most likely had little time to contribute significantly to the family income. Evidence from Towle's trial revealed that he had been unemployed at some stage in the period preceding the Loughborough 'job', and according to one hostile witness Towle had confessed to him that he 'felt so much hurt, he hardly knew what to do with himself'.<sup>151</sup> Towle's trial also revealed that he was partly reliant for income on pawning his clothes. When one witness identified Towle by his breeches, Towle had his pawnbroker give evidence that these breeches were in pawn at the time of the attack at Loughborough.<sup>152</sup> The contrast with Joseph Woolley is stark: a framework knitter who was nearly forty years old by the time Luddism commenced; commanded a good income from knitting, leavened by the sale of produce grown in his garden and his 'quackery'; and – crucially – a single man.<sup>153</sup>

Given the poverty of the knitters it is hardly surprising that they resorted to desperate acts of survival crime such as poaching. For those who were

employed – and many were not – Felkin calculated that the average wage of a knitter in the coarser branches was around seven shillings a week, and this at a time when a quartern loaf was selling for over one shilling.<sup>154</sup> Another persistent complaint was that the knitters had very limited or no alternative means to support themselves. There were some friendly societies in existence at this time, and given the privations of the knitters membership numbers seem high, but the money invested was not there to supplement low wages or periods of under-employment and so would have been of limited use as an everyday survival strategy.<sup>155</sup> To make matters worse, the local friendly societies invested their funds in stocking frames and achieved returns on their investments through frame rents. Yet frame rents were one of the grievances complained of by the Luddites, so when hosiers agreed to a reduction ‘they unwittingly halved the value of the workman’s insurance policies, generating further insecurity’.<sup>156</sup> As was the case in Lancashire, friendly society membership and poor relief seem to be negatively correlated: the more stringent poor relief, the higher friendly society membership. Certainly in 1813, the year for which data exists, there were more members of friendly societies than were in receipt of poor relief in the three knitting villages of Arnold, Basford and Bulwell: 554 in receipt of some form of relief against a membership of 1397.<sup>157</sup>

The inadequacies of poor relief was another constraint on the makeshift economy of the knitters. True, the total monies raised and spent on poor relief increased significantly in the knitting villages: in 1803 the total number of people in receipt of poor relief in the whole wapentake of Broxtowe (which included most of the knitting villages) numbered 1596; by 1817 the number of

relief in the village of Arnold alone was 1096 (960 in Basford, and 460 in Bulwell).<sup>158</sup> The per capita expenditure on poor relief was very low (comparable with Lancashire and the West Riding), much below the average for England as a whole, and not significantly greater than the per capita expenditure for the agricultural areas of Nottinghamshire.<sup>159</sup> In the parish of Arnold, per capital expenditure on poor relief in 1811 was 5s, by 1812 7s. 3d.; in Basford 6s 3d (1811), 5s 4d. (1812); in Bulwell 5s. 1d. (1811), 7s. 2d. (1812). It was not until 1816-17 that there was a marked rise in per capita expenditure: Arnold (19s.), Basford (13s. 3d.), Bulwell (10s. 4d.). These figures do, however, need to be set against the dramatic rise in the number of those in receipt of poor relief. In 1813, 12 per cent of the population in Arnold parish had been in receipt of some form of poor relief (against a national average of 9.2 per cent); by 1816-17 the figure was 36 per cent; in Basford 33 per cent compared with 3.4 per cent in 1813; in Bulwell 23 per cent up from 2.6 per cent.<sup>160</sup> Thus, the overall cake by 1816-17 may have been larger but it was being cut into a much greater number of smaller pieces. Whether poor relief was more stingy by 1811-12 than it had been ten years earlier is impossible to determine from the available data; yet it was certainly more stingy by 1816-17 than it had been in 1813. In 1813 those in receipt of poor relief in the parish of Hucknall Torkard (the only knitting village for which comparable data exists) had an annual average of £5.53 in new money spent on them; by 1816-17 the figure was £1.42. While the figure for 1813 is comparable with spending per pauper in southern agricultural districts, the figure for 1816-17 is significantly below.<sup>161</sup>

A further contraction in the makeshift economy of the knitters issued from the enclosure of common and wasteland. Part of the problem here is that during the boom years (from the late 1780s through to about 1807) when hosiery had expanded rapidly the prospect of high wages had lured many labourers away from the field. We know from the memoir written by William Felkin that it was not uncommon for knitters at this time to have had a plot of land on which to keep a small number of animals and grow a few crops, though it does seem that high wages at first and then subsequently long working hours meant that by the early nineteenth century 'framework knitting was not a part-time occupation filling the gaps between seasonal agricultural activities'.<sup>162</sup> This should not disguise the fact that many knitters had *had* a small plot of land, or could remember their fathers having land. Against the background of over-speculation, the glutting of markets, the catastrophic impact of the revolutionary wars, the knitter had been forced to work for longer hours and for less money, which meant that they had little time for cultivation. By the early nineteenth century the best any poor knitter could hope for was to grow a few vegetables in their gardens. James Towle in his confession claimed that one of the ways in which the Luddites had attempted to put pressure on knitters to join them was by 'destroying their potatoe [sic] and onion beds in the night, cutting up their Gooseberry and Currant bushes *if they have any*' [emphasis added].<sup>163</sup>

In the meantime, much of the land in Nottinghamshire had been enclosed. Between 1787 and 1810 84,475 acres of land were enclosed, the single largest period of enclosure in the county. Of those villages and small towns that had a sizeable number of framework knitters Arnold was enclosed in 1791;



Lambley in 1797; Basford in 1797, Radford in 1800, Sutton-in-Ashfield in 1800, Blidworth as recently as 1812.<sup>164</sup> The negative impact of enclosure seems to have stemmed less from any direct expropriation of land that the knitters had owned or rented for the purpose of growing a few crops. Rather, it seems that enclosure had circumscribed the ability of the knitters to supplement their meagre wages with customary privileges such as wood gathering (a right not to be underestimated – paying for fuel over a year was the equivalent of one month's wages) and grazing rights. The greatest casualty of enclosure was the forest, which had consisted of open fields, large tracts of waste, heath land and meadows. Take Basford as an example: one of the first actions of the few landlords who now owned most of Basford parish was to plant new trees on much of the commons and waste land, wood then being at a premium given the war. Yet if 'land was previously forest heath or waste...then the commercial planting of trees effectively rendered common and/or customary rights useless'.<sup>165</sup> Forests were more than simply safe places for Luddites to hide and plan their attacks; as Carl Griffin has argued, forests were popular spaces with connotations of freedom and independence, while they also kept people warm and free from starvation.<sup>166</sup> In 1792, when the enclosing process was drawing to a close in Basford, the *Nottingham Date-Book* observed that 'not a single acre of land was reserved for the use of the public, though nearly 1500 acres had up to this time been enjoyed in common by all the inhabitants'.<sup>167</sup> Such was the pressure on land in Basford that by 1807 cattle belonging to those with no land were to be found in the village lanes, with the result that the parish vestry issued an order that such cattle would be impounded and anyone who resisted would be prosecuted.<sup>168</sup> As with wood gathering, the value of keeping as little as two

cows could produce dairy products equivalent in value to the labour of a full-time employed male agricultural labourer.<sup>169</sup> While it is difficult to establish a direct connection between protest actions and enclosure, the ripping up of hedges, breaking of fences and damaging of crops – all of which, as we have seen, accompanied frame-breaking – might well have represented attempts to ‘unenclose’ the land.<sup>170</sup> The length of time between an initial enclosure meeting and the passing of an enclosure often resulted from local and popular resistance: the process of enclosing Basford began in 1773 but was not completed until 1797.<sup>171</sup> The major beneficiaries of enclosure at Basford was the Earl of Chesterfield, the vicar and none other than the lord lieutenant, the Duke of Newcastle. The latter was drawing over £1500 annually in rents from Basford by the 1810s.<sup>172</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Luddism in Nottinghamshire was about more than a mere dispute over pay and conditions; neither was it the latest episode in the evolving history of trade unionism. To understand the character of Nottinghamshire Luddism it needs situating in the context of rural protest and the strategies of everyday resistance not radical politics or insurrectionary activity, though it is worth noting that it meets the criteria of ‘revolt’ as defined by some medieval historians.<sup>173</sup> In short, the Luddites of Nottinghamshire were not that different from their northern cousins in Lancashire and the West Riding, where Luddism, as historians have long recognised, was more complex and took place alongside other forms of protest.<sup>174</sup> Machine breaking was only the most dramatic form of protest

employed by the knitters, and was, in fact, part of a well-established pattern of protest, much of it covert, which brought the knitters into conflict not only with their employers but also the local squirearchy and the forces of law and order.<sup>175</sup> In other words, the Luddites and the Swing Rioters had much more in common than simply machine breaking: like Swing, East Midlands Luddism represented an intensification of pre-existing protest and survival strategies employed by the knitters. To argue that Midlands' Luddism was strictly confined to industrial disputes is to separate off the world of work from the world of survival for the knitters.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, the two were intimately linked: as the knitters found themselves ever more dependent on a sweated and debased trade with long hours and low pay, the knitters came to rely more and more on alternative survival strategies at a time when most of these alternatives were contracting, notably poor relief and the exercise of common rights; hence the recourse to friendly societies and less legitimate activities. Here the knitter found himself locked in a vicious circle: the contracting makeshift economy pushed him back on to a trade that was already debased and over-populated in an area where there were few opportunities, much less attractive ones, for alternative employment.

Luddism, though a calculated tactic, issued from the desperation of the knitters. The Luddites of the villages could be just as violent as their northern cousins; Luddism in the region only appears much less violent and more constitutional from a bird's-eye view, and one that swoops in on Nottingham town. On the other hand, while Luddism was in some respects a highly organised covert operation, it is important not to over-rationalise the movement.

It was far from being the ‘stately gavotte’ of food riots, with its violence and the license of the crowd.<sup>177</sup> That some Luddites felt the need to go to such lengths to proclaim the legality and advertise their restrained and discriminate dispensing of justice issued just as much with their own supporters in mind as it did the general public. Violent they may have been; but semi-professional criminals divorced from their communities the village Luddites were not. Luddite cells grew organically from kinship, neighbourhood, trade connections and through indigenous and endemic criminal gangs that grew out of the rough culture of the knitters. These connections were facilitated by an intimate geographical knowledge of the places in which they operated and were able to use to their advantage against the authorities whom they so often outwitted and outmanoeuvred. Craig Calhoun has argued that Luddism was a ‘movement which grew directly out of local community roots’.<sup>178</sup> It also grew just as much from the links between these communities: it was an inter-communal movement that dug deep into the traditions of the countryside even when it manifested itself in the town.

The protest toolkit of the Nottinghamshire Luddites consisted of tried and tested strategies and tactics, including frame-breaking. In his recent synthesis of protest in Hanoverian England, Adrian Randall concedes that ‘attempts to murder obnoxious employers’ may well have ‘indicated a new level of industrial violence in the East Midlands’.<sup>179</sup> Yet this kind of violence was neither new nor industrial but, in fact, had a long history, in the tradition of peasant *jacquerie*, around which exists a parallel set of debates: knee-jerk protest to misery or politicised revolt; elemental protest or ‘social banditry’?<sup>180</sup>

When medieval woollen workers in Siena were confronted by the intransigence of their employers in 1370-1, they marched on the city, assaulted magistrates and threatened to kill their employers just as the village knitters did in 1811-12.<sup>181</sup> Closer to home, across the Irish Sea, threatening – and occasionally taking – the lives of obnoxious landowners was a marked feature of agrarian protest movements.<sup>182</sup> While murder was unusual in an English context, threatening lives was far more common as the long tradition of the threatening letter testifies even if most were ultimately concerned to bring about a restoration of paternalism and deference.<sup>183</sup> With the over-rationalisation of Luddism, and much protest history more generally, we run the risk of losing sight of what was traditional – and rural – in the protest movements of the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century. From this perspective, village Luddites had far more in common with medieval protesting peasants than they did with Chartists.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, William Sherbrooke, J.P. lived at Oxton – five miles from the parish of Arnold in which he owned considerable land.

<sup>2</sup> The National Archives (TNA), Home Office (HO), 43/19, J. Beckett to N. Conant and W. Baker, 24, 27 and 31 January 1812; House of Commons, First Series, vol. 21, 14 February 1812, col. 807.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland South-East Asia* (New Haven, 2009), ix, 2.

<sup>4</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Newcastle to Home Office, 23 November 1811.

<sup>5</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Conant to Home Office, 4 December 1811; TNA, HO 42/119, Thomas Boosey to Home Office, 14 January 1812.

<sup>6</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), 553.

<sup>7</sup> M. I. Thomis, *The Luddites: Machine-Breaking in Regency England* (Newton Abbot, 1970), 27.

<sup>8</sup> Thomis, *ibid.*, 138; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1964), 8; Thompson, *op.cit.*, 588; M. Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (Aldershot, 2000), 92.

<sup>9</sup> Griffin does, however, acknowledge that there was ‘no neat, teleological shift from “pre-modern” to “modern” forms of protest’, and is alert to some of the rural characteristics of Luddism. C. J. Griffin, *Protest, Politics and Work in Rural England, 1700-1850* (Basingstoke, 2014), 93, 120-7.

<sup>10</sup> K. Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848* (Manchester, 2016), ch. 8.

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<sup>11</sup> J. Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 217; K. Binfield (ed.), *Writings of the Luddites* (Baltimore, MD, 2004); A. Randall, *Riotous Assemblies: Popular Protest in Hanoverian England* (Oxford, 2006), 296.

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, *op.cit.*, 543; Thomis, *op.cit.*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> K. Navickas, 'Luddism, Incendiarism and the Defence of Rural "Task-Scapes" in 1812', *Northern History*, 48, 1 (March, 2011), 59-73, here 60.

<sup>14</sup> S. King and A. Tomkins (eds), *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshift* (Manchester, 2003), 1; S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law* (Woodbridge, 2011), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Binfield, *op.cit.*; C. Steedman, *An Everyday Life of the English Working Class: Work, Self and Sociability in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2013), 179-180; S. Chapman, *The Early Factory Masters* (Newton Abbot, 1967), 187.

<sup>16</sup> D. Hopkin, *Voices of the People in Nineteenth Century France* (Cambridge, 2012), 9.

<sup>17</sup> Nottinghamshire Archives (NA), M429, Reports from Baker and Conant at Nottingham, 1 February 1812.

<sup>18</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Derby Magistrates to Home Office, 6 December 1811; TNA, HO 42/118, Ric[hard] Hardy, Rector of Loughborough, to Home Office, 16 December 1811.

<sup>19</sup> W. Felkin, *Felkin's History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufactures* (Newton Abbot, 1967), 233.

<sup>20</sup> *Derby Mercury*, 12 December 1811.

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<sup>21</sup> TNA, HO 42/119, George Coldham to Home Office, 15 January 1812.

<sup>22</sup> Randall and Charlesworth have calculated that ‘well over a quarter of all of the frames’ broken in Nottinghamshire occurred in Nottingham, though how they arrived at this figure is unclear. A. Randall and A. Charlesworth, ‘The Luddite Disturbances, 1811-12’, in A. Charlesworth et al, *An Atlas of Industrial Protest in Britain, 1750-1990* (Basingstoke, 1996), 34-37.

<sup>23</sup> Felkin, *op.cit.*, 437.

<sup>24</sup> NA, M429, Reports from Baker and Conant, 22 January 1812.

<sup>25</sup> TNA, HO 42/119, A brief statement...of the disturbances in the country of Nottingham and the town of Nottingham, 27 January 1812.

<sup>26</sup> For example, letter from ‘Ned Lud’ at Nottingham to ‘Mr H’ at Bulwell, reprinted in Binfield, *op.cit.*, 73.

<sup>27</sup> *The Nottingham Date-Book* (2 vols, Nottingham, 1884), II, 122.

<sup>28</sup> A. Randall, *Before the Luddites: Custom, Community and Machinery in the English Woollen Industry, 1776-1809* (Cambridge, 1991), ch. 5.

<sup>29</sup> A. Rogers, ‘Rural Industries and Social Structure: The Framework Knitting Industry of South Nottinghamshire 1670-1840’, *Textile History*, 13, 1 (May, 1982), 7-35.

<sup>30</sup> B. Reay, *Rural Englands: Labouring Lives in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 2004), 20.

<sup>31</sup> *White’s History, Gazetteer, Directory of Nottinghamshire* (Sheffield, 1832), 546.

<sup>32</sup> TNA, Treasury Solicitor (TS) 11/1016/4170, Trial of James Towle.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, HO 42/119, A brief statement, *op.cit.*.



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<sup>34</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Lt. Col. Wylde to Home Office, 17 November 1811; *Derby Mercury*, 16 January 1812; *Nottingham Review*, 29 November 1811.

<sup>35</sup> J. S. Donnelly, Jr., *Captain Rock: The Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821-1824* (Cork, 2009), 51; C. J. Griffin, “Cut down by some cowardly miscreants”: Plant Maiming, or the Malicious Cutting of Flora, as an Act of Protest in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Rural England’, *Rural History*, 19, 1 (April 2008), 29-54.

<sup>36</sup> R. A. E. Wells, *Riot and Political Disaffection in Nottinghamshire in the Age of Revolutions, 1776-1803: The Origins of Nottinghamshire Radicalism* (Nottingham, 1983), 31-33.

<sup>37</sup> *Nottingham Review*, 22 November 1811.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Newcastle to Home Office, 16 November 1811; *Nottingham Date-Book*, II, 229, 234, 273, 278.

<sup>39</sup> Thomis’ own research revealed that local food prices reached their peak in 1811-12 for the period 1785-1835. M. I. Thomis, *Politics and Society in Nottingham, 1785-1835* (Oxford, 1969), 19.

<sup>40</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 11 September 1812.

<sup>41</sup> Wells, *op.cit.*, 7, 15.

<sup>42</sup> A. Booth, ‘Food Riots in the North-West of England, 1790-1801’, *Past & Present*, 77, 1 (November 1977), 84-107, here 104.

<sup>43</sup> TNA, TS 25/5/117, Opinion of Law Officers...Thomas Kirke; TNA, HO 40/3, Confession of John Blackburn, 9 January 1817; *Nottingham Review*, 27 December 1811.

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- <sup>44</sup> J. H. Beardsmore, *History of Hucknall Torkard* (Mansfield, 1909), 113; Confession of John Blackburn, *ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> Steedman, *op. cit.*, 194; J. Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT, 2007).
- <sup>46</sup> TNA, HO 79/1, J. Beckett to Conant, 2 February 1812.
- <sup>47</sup> NA, M429, Reports of Conant and Baker, 3 February 1812.
- <sup>48</sup> Donnelly, Jr., *op.cit.*, 111.
- <sup>49</sup> N. Simms, 'Ned Ludd's Mummers Plays', *Folklore*, 89, 2 (January 1978), 166-78; A. Howkins and L. Merricks, "'Wee be black as Hell": Ritual, Disguise and Rebellion', *Rural History*, 4, 1 (April 1993), 41-53.
- <sup>50</sup> TNA, TS 25/5/117, Opinion of Law Officers...Thomas Kirke; P. Millington, "'Plough Bullocks" and other Plough Monday Customs in the Nottingham Area, 1800-1920', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 109, 1 (March 2005), 127-37.
- <sup>51</sup> NA, M/1000, Evidence of Framebreaking in Nottinghamshire, 1811-16.
- <sup>52</sup> A. Blackstock, 'Tommy Downshire's Boys: Popular Protest, Social Change and Political Manipulation in Mid-Ulster, 1829-1847', *Past & Present*, 196, 1 (August 2007), 125-172, here 136.
- <sup>53</sup> TNA, HO 42/120, Conant and Baker to Home Office, 11 February 1812.
- <sup>54</sup> B. Turner, 'Luddism and the Law', (PhD, Queensland, 1993), 105.
- <sup>55</sup> TNA, HO 42/119, A brief statement, *op.cit.*; TNA, HO 42/124, Deposition of John Cooper Kirk, 8 June 1812; *Nottingham Journal*, 1 February 1812.
- <sup>56</sup> Navickas, *Protest, op.cit.*, 15.

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<sup>57</sup> B. Bushaway, *By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England, 1700-1880* (London, 1982), 195.

<sup>58</sup> R. A. Church and S. D. Chapman, 'Gravener Henson and the Making of the English Working Class', in E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay (eds), *Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1967), 140-44.

<sup>59</sup> BPP, *Report from the Committee on the Framework-Knitters Petitions*, 1812 (247), 9, 32; BPP, *Appendix to Report...into the Condition of the Framework Knitters*, 1845 (641), 16-17.

<sup>60</sup> Church and Chapman, *op.cit.*, 141.

<sup>61</sup> BPP, *Factories Inquiry Commission*, 1833 (450), 34-5, 185.

<sup>62</sup> D. Smith, *Industrial Archaeology of the East Midlands* (London, 1965), 37.

<sup>63</sup> Felkin, *op.cit.*, 234.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, George Sculthorpe to Home Office, 13 November 1811.

<sup>65</sup> Felkin, *op.cit.*, 235; *The Times*, 1 February 1812; F. O. Darvall, *Popular Disturbances and Public Order in Regency England* (Oxford, 1969), 259.

<sup>66</sup> TNA, HO 42/120, Conant and Baker to Home Office, 9 February 1812.

<sup>67</sup> University of Nottingham Archives (UNA), NeC 4917/2, Return of Detachments from the Garrison of Nottingham, 9 February 1812.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, HO 42/125, Deposition of John Amos, 18 April 1812; TNA, TS 11/368, Rex... v Benjamin Hancock for frame breaking, 13 March 1812; *Derby Mercury*, 16 January 1812; TNA, HO 42/119, Baker to Home Office, 28 January 1812, reproduced in M. I. Thomis (ed.), *Luddism in Nottinghamshire* (Thoroton Society Record Series, vol. xxvi, 1972), 25.

<sup>69</sup> *Nottingham Review*, 31 January 1812.

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<sup>70</sup> *Nottingham Journal*, 16 November 1811; F. Jarrige, 'De la sauvagerie à la violence créatrice: Regards sur les bris de machines dans la France du premier XIXe siècle', *Revue européenne d'histoire*, 20, 6 (December 2013), 1031-46, here 1033-34; J. Horn, "A Beautiful Madness": Privilege, the Machine Question and Industrial Development in Normandy in 1789', *Past & Present*, 217, 1 (November 2012), 149-185, here 181-2.

<sup>71</sup> UNA, NeC 6155, James Stevens to Newcastle, 16 September 1812.

<sup>72</sup> TNA, HO 42/119, Conant to W. Beckett, 10 December 1811.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, HO 42/118, Middleton to Home Office, 12 December 1811.

<sup>74</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Samuel Smith to Home Office, 27 November 1811, reproduced in Thomis, *Luddism, op.cit.*, 5.

<sup>75</sup> TNA HO 42/117, William Sherbrooke to Newcastle, 30 November 1811.

<sup>76</sup> TNA HO 42/118, George Coldham to Home Office, 12 December 1812.

<sup>77</sup> TNA, HO 42/119, A brief statement, *op.cit.*, f.705.

<sup>78</sup> Thompson, *op.cit.*, 554.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, TS 11/368, Rex v Hancock, *op.cit.*

<sup>80</sup> TNA, HO 40/3, Confession of John Blackburn, 9 January 1817.

<sup>81</sup> NA, C/QA/CP5/5/1-14, Parochial statement and expenditure of Basford, 4 January 1817.

<sup>82</sup> TNA, HO 40/4, Confession of William Burton, 22 January 1817.

<sup>83</sup> P. Sharpe, 'The Shiners: Framework-Knitting Households in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, 1840-1890', *Family & Community History*, 3, 2 (2000), 105-120, here 112.

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<sup>84</sup> C. Griffin, 'The Violent Captain Swing', *Past and Present*, 209, 1 (November, 2010), 149-80.

<sup>85</sup> Binfield, *op.cit.*, p. 23; Steedman, *op.cit.*, 122, 126, 220.

<sup>86</sup> Thompson, *op.cit.*, 535.

<sup>87</sup> TNA, HO 42/152, Informers' report on Towle et al, 1 July 1816.

<sup>88</sup> Randall and Charlesworth, *op.cit.*, 34-5.

<sup>89</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Examination of George Jeffery, 14 November 1811.

<sup>90</sup> Thompson, *op.cit.*, 554.

<sup>91</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Sculthorpe to Home Office, 13 November 1811; TNA, HO 42/117, Thomas Wright to Home Office, 17 November 1811; *Nottingham Review*, 29 November 1811; *Derby Mercury*, 21 November and 5 December 1811; TNA, NO 42/119, A brief statement, *op.cit.*.

<sup>92</sup> R. Jones, 'At War with the Future', *History Today*, 62, 5 (May, 2012), 49.

<sup>93</sup> *White's History*, 103.

<sup>94</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Examination of Jeffery, *op.cit.*; K. Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire, 1798-1815* (Oxford, 2009), 195-7.

<sup>95</sup> Wells, *op.cit.*, 7, 15.

<sup>96</sup> TS 11/1050, Rex vs William Carnell and Joseph Maples, 13 March 1812; TNA, HO 42/118, A List of Offences Committed, n.d.; TNA, HO 42/117, Examination of Jeffery, *op.cit.*

<sup>97</sup> NA, M429, Reports of Conant and Baker, 26 January 1812.

<sup>98</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Sherbrooke to Newcastle, 30 November 1811.

<sup>99</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Newcastle to Home Office, 2 December 1811.

<sup>100</sup> Thomis, *Luddites*, *op.cit.*, 119.

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<sup>101</sup> TNA, HO 42/119, A brief statement, *op.cit.*; Thomis, *Luddites, op.cit.*, 177; NA, M429, Reports from Baker and Conant, 3 February 1812; NA, DDTS/15/8/4, Frame-Breaking Reward, 25 January 1812.

<sup>102</sup> Chase, *op.cit.*, 92.

<sup>103</sup> Thompson, *op.cit.*, 538.

<sup>104</sup> Church and Chapman, *op.cit.*, 144.

<sup>105</sup> Chase, *op.cit.*, 1-2.

<sup>106</sup> TNA, HO 42/120, Nottingham Framebreaking, 1811-1812.

<sup>107</sup> J. R. Dinwiddy, 'Luddism and Politics in the Northern Counties', *Social History*, 4, 1 (January 1979), 33-63, here 36.

<sup>108</sup> Turner, *op.cit.*, ch.3.

<sup>109</sup> Jones, *op.cit.*, 78.

<sup>110</sup> NA, DDTS 15/8/4, Reward for information relating to frame breaking, 25 January 1812; *Morning Post*, 2 January 1812 *Nottingham Review*, 16 January 1813; Felkin, *op.cit.*, 239; TNA, HO 42/124, Deposition of John Cooper Kirk, 8 June 1812; TNA, HO 42/117, Sherbrooke to Newcastle, 30 November 1811.

<sup>111</sup> "Declaration; Extraordinary" by "Thos Death" to "Edward Ludd", Nottingham', reprinted in Binfield, *op.cit.*, 70-3.

<sup>112</sup> TNA, HO 42/123, Sculthorpe to Home Office, 3 May 1812; *Nottingham Date-Book*, II, 284; TNA, HO 42/132, H. Enfield to Home Secretary, 15 February 1813; *Reports of the Trial of James Towle, at Leicester* (4th edn, Nottingham, 1817), p. I; Felkin, *op.cit.*, 237; *Morning Post*, 2 January 1812.

<sup>113</sup> TNA, HO 43/2, Ryder to Bailey, 9 March 1812.

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<sup>114</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, High Sheriff to Home Office, 4 December 1811; Newcastle to Home Office, 2 December 1811.

<sup>115</sup> TNA, HO 42/152, Lockett to Home Office, 11 August 1816; *Morning Post*, 19 August 1816.

<sup>116</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Sherbrooke to Newcastle, 30 November 1811.

<sup>117</sup> TNA, HO 42/120, circular issued by magistrates.

<sup>118</sup> Navickas, *Protest, op.cit.*, 131-2, 150; Griffin, 'The Violent Captain Swing'; S. Carroll (ed.), *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke, 2007).

<sup>119</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Newcastle to Home Office, 16 November 1811.

<sup>120</sup> C. J. Griffin, *The Rural War: Captain Swing and the Politics of Protest* (Manchester, 2012), ch. 8 (quote at 214); S. O. Rose, 'Gender Segregation in the Transition to the Factory: the English Hosiery Industry, 1850-1910', *Feminist Studies*, 13, 1 (Spring 1987), 163-184.

<sup>121</sup> Thomis, *Luddites, op.cit.*, 104, 119.

<sup>122</sup> *Reports of the Trial of James Towle* (3<sup>rd</sup> end) pp. 28, 41; TNA, HO 42/152, Enfield to Home Office, 4 July 1816.

<sup>123</sup> TNA, HO 42/152, Lockett to Home Office, 11 August 1816.

<sup>124</sup> UNA, Newcastle Papers, NeC 4968/3, Statement by James Towle on the morning of his execution, 20 November 1816.

<sup>125</sup> J. E. Archer, '*By a Flash and a Scare*': *Arson, Animal Maiming, and Poaching in East Anglia 1815-1870* (Oxford, 1990), 11.

<sup>126</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Newcastle to Home Office, 2 December 1811.

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<sup>127</sup> *Manchester Mercury*, 5 January 1813; TNA, TS 11/1050, Rex vs Carnell and Maples, *op.cit.*

<sup>128</sup> TNA, HO 42/120, J. T. Becher to Home Office, 11 February 1812.

<sup>129</sup> TNA, HO 42/120, Hardy to Home Office, 20 February 1812.

<sup>130</sup> *Trial of Towle* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn), 51.

<sup>131</sup> Archer, 'By a Flash', *op.cit.*, 5-6.

<sup>132</sup> J. Rule and R. Wells, *Crime, Protest and Popular Politics in Southern England 1740-1850* (London, 1997), 47.

<sup>133</sup> P. King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion: Law and Social Relations in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>134</sup> NA, QSM/1/36, Quarter Session Minute Book, 1809-1813, n.p.

<sup>135</sup> J. E. Archer, 'Poaching Gangs and Violence: The Urban-Rural Divide in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire', *British Journal of Criminology*, 39, 1 (January 1999), 25-38, here 37.

<sup>136</sup> UNA, Newcastle Papers, NeC 4966, Launcelot Rolleston to Newcastle, 16 February 1817.

<sup>137</sup> Anon. [Joseph Burdett], 'Reollections of a Journey Stockinger, 1816', typescript in NA, DD/1177/1, 16.

<sup>138</sup> TNA, HO 42/118, Middleton to Home Office, 12 December 1811; UNA, Manvers Papers, MA 6A 1/24, Thoresby Disbursements; *White's History*, 105; TNA, HO 42/117, Return of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Nottingham Local Militia, 17 November 1811.

<sup>139</sup> TNA, HO 42/117, Examination of George Jeffery, 14 November 1811.

<sup>140</sup> 'Reollections of a Journey Stockinger, 1816', 13.



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<sup>141</sup> TNA HO 42/121, Bailey to Ryder, 16 March 1812; NA, QSM/1/35, Quarter Session Minute Book, 1803-1809, n.p.

<sup>142</sup> J. F. Sutton, *The Date-Book of Remarkable and Memorable Events connected with Nottingham* (London, 1852), 322.

<sup>143</sup> Binfield, *op.cit.*, 164.

<sup>144</sup> TNA, HO 42/155, Informer's report on Towle's funeral, 22 November 1816.

<sup>145</sup> N. Whelehan, 'Youth, Generations and Collective Action in Nineteenth-Century Ireland and Italy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 56, 4 (October 2014), 934-66.

<sup>146</sup> *Nottingham Date-Book*, II, 283.

<sup>147</sup> *Derby Mercury*, 28 November 1816.

<sup>148</sup> W. P. W. Phillimore (ed.), *Nottinghamshire Parish Registers: Marriages: Vol. VI: Broxtowe Wapentake: South Part* (London, 1904), 60

<sup>149</sup> For poverty/life-cycle see Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle*.

<sup>150</sup> NA, PR/5914-5, St. Leodegarius Parish Church, Basford, Baptism Register, 1802-1812, 1813-1829.

<sup>151</sup> *Trial of Towle* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn), 10.

<sup>152</sup> TNA, HO 42/152, informers' report, 9 August 1816.

<sup>153</sup> Steedman, *op.cit.*, ch.8.

<sup>154</sup> *Factories Inquiry Commission*, 181.

<sup>155</sup> M. Gorsky, 'The Growth and Distribution of English Friendly Societies in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, 51, 3 (August 1998), 489-511, here 493.

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- <sup>156</sup> S. D. Chapman, *Hosiery and Knitwear: Four Centuries of Small-Scale Industry in Britain, c1589-2000* (Oxford, 2002), 81.
- <sup>157</sup> BPP, *Abstract of Returns...Relative to the Expenses and Maintenance of the Poor in England*, 1818 (82), 342-3.
- <sup>158</sup> NA, C/QA CP515, Parochial Statements of Poor Law Overseers, 1816-17.
- <sup>159</sup> J. D. Marshall, 'The Nottinghamshire Reformers and their Contribution to the New Poor Law', *Economic History Review*, 13, 3 (April 1961), 382-396, here 385-6; S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850* (Manchester, 2000), 6.
- <sup>160</sup> There is also some evidence to suggest that poor relief was much more widely dispersed in Nottingham in 1811-12 than it was in the surrounding villages. Felkin recalled of January 1812 that nearly half of the total population of Nottingham were in receipt of some form of poor relief. Felkin, *op.cit.*, 231.
- <sup>161</sup> Williams, *op.cit.*, 28, 38.
- <sup>162</sup> Felkin, *op.cit.*, ix; Steedman, *op.cit.*, 207; Rogers, *op.cit.*, 17.
- <sup>163</sup> *Trial of Towle* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn), 12; UNA, Newcastle Papers, NeC 4968/3, Statement by James Towle, *op.cit.*
- <sup>164</sup> M. E. Brown, 'Aspects of Parliamentary Enclosure in Nottinghamshire', (PhD, Leicester, 1995), 127-8, 143-4.
- <sup>165</sup> Griffin, 'Plant Maiming', *op.cit.*, 37.
- <sup>166</sup> C. J. Griffin, 'Space and Place – Popular Perceptions of Forests', in E. Ritter and D. Dauksta (eds), *New Perspectives on People and Forests* (London, 2011), 139-58.
- <sup>167</sup> *Nottingham Date-Book*, II, 184.

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- <sup>168</sup> NA, PR/27297, Basford Vestry Minute Book, 28 April 1807.
- <sup>169</sup> J. Humphries, 'Enclosures, Common Rights, and Women: The Proletarianisation of Families in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Journal of Economic History*, 50, 1 (March 1990), 17-42, here 24 and 26.
- <sup>170</sup> Navickas, *Protest, op.cit.*, 228.
- <sup>171</sup> Brown, 'Aspects of Enclosure', 143, 195, 215.
- <sup>172</sup> UNA, Ne3 A5, Rental and Account Book for the Clumber Collection of Newcastle Estates, p. 32; NA, EA 1797 Basford Enclosure Award.
- <sup>173</sup> S. K. Cohn, Jr., *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns* (Cambridge, 2013), 27.
- <sup>174</sup> J. E. Archer, *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England, 1780-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), 49-50.
- <sup>175</sup> R. A. E. Wells, 'The Development of the English Rural Proletariat and Social Protest, 1700-1850', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 6, 2 (January 1979), 115-39.
- <sup>176</sup> Griffin, *Captain Swing, op.cit.*, Part I.
- <sup>177</sup> A. Charlesworth, 'From the Moral Economy of Devon to the Political Economy of Manchester, 1790-1812', *Social History*, 18, 2 (May 1993), 205-217, here 210.
- <sup>178</sup> C. Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution* (Chicago, 1982), 60.
- <sup>179</sup> Randall, *Riotous Assemblies, op.cit.*, 295.
- <sup>180</sup> The classic study, and one that situates the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381, in the European context of peasant protest, remains R. Hilton, *Bond Men Made*

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*Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (London, 1973).

<sup>181</sup> S. K. Cohn, Jr., *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200-1424* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 58-9.

<sup>182</sup> Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, 3-6; S. R. Gibbons, *Captain Rock Night Errant: The Threatening Letters of Pre-Famine Ireland, 1801-1845* (Dublin, 2004).

<sup>183</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'The Crime of Anonymity', in D. Hay, P. Linebaugh, J. Rule, E. P. Thompson and C. Winslow (eds), *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1975), 255-344.