

The Newport March - November 3rd 1839 and aftermath

The night of Sunday 3rd November was a very wet one that totally soaked the Chartists waiting to march to Newport. There were speeches by the leaders and grumbling from the men who were fed up of waiting for the start.

John Frosts' men marched down from Blackwood to meet the other groups, but Zephaniah Williams' Ebbw Vale men arrived late with many of them drunk. William Jones, who was supposed to be leading a group from Pontypool never arrived, and so valuable time was lost. The authorities also knew that the Chartists were now on their way.

When they got to Newport, the Chartists went straight to the Westgate Hotel where the authorities were waiting.

With the demonstrators building up behind, their leaders demanded the release of Henry Vincent - but the mayor of Newport refused.

Then, a sudden surge in the crowd saw the Chartists break through into the Westgate Hotel.

Inside, the Chartists got a surprise as thirty soldiers began to open fire. Some fired at the Chartists in the hall, but most smashed the windows at the front of the hotel and fired on the demonstrators.

The Chartists panicked and fled, leaving thirty dead and many more injured.

Many of the injured were left to crawl away with some frightful wounds, wildly crying for mercy, writhing in agony and desperate for water.

By the end of November, most of the Chartist leaders had been arrested; some Chartist supporters had given evidence against them. The authorities became even more convinced that the rising had been a genuine attempt at revolution and not just a protest to free Vincent or put forward Chartist ideas.

The leaders, Frost, Williams and Jones were all found guilty along with many others. However, whilst others were sentenced to prison and transportation, the leaders were all sentenced to death.

Campaigns developed all over Britain to reduce the sentences for the leaders, more violence and riots were threatened. Eventually, the government reduced the sentences to transportation for life.

Chartism continued in Newport after the rising, but it never received the same passionate support as it had in 1839, even when Frost returned to Newport in 1856.

