



# Holberrys

*A Play for Sheffield  
and Newport*

By Chris Searle





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### **Note on the cover photo and photos inside:**

The Holberrys of modern times: the community of Newport and local schoolchildren re-enact the historic Chartist “Rising” on November 4th 1839 at Newport, Monmouthshire, when 22 Chartist supporters lost their lives, shot by soldiers of the 45th Regiment of Foot. John Frost, the leader of the Newport Chartists was arrested and charged with High Treason. In early 1840, he was tried along with two other Chartist leaders, William Jones, and Zephaniah Williams. All three were found guilty and became the last men in Britain to be sentenced to be 'hanged, drawn and quartered'. More than 3 million people signed a petition for clemency and his sentence was commuted to transportation and a life of penal servitude in Tasmania. The Chartists continued to campaign for his release and in 1854 he was granted a conditional pardon and returned to Britain in 1856.

The photographs in this edition feature students from schools in Newport and Monmouth. It was recreated at historic locations in Newport where the 1839 Chartist insurrection occurred. The re-enactment in November 2008 and 2009, involved students from: St. Woolos Primary School, Maindee Primary School, Malpas Court Primary School, and Monmouth School.

The illustrations depicting the 1839 Chartist crowd scenes show details of ceramic mosaics that formed a 100 feet long mural of the Newport Rising in the centre of Newport. Designed and installed by the ceramic artist, Kenneth Budd in 1978, the mural was demolished to make way for the construction of a new shopping development in 2013.

## A Note on the Play

This play on the lives and struggles of Samuel and Mary Holberry is not bound by historical fact, although it has certainly been prompted by it.

The detail of most of the Holberrys' lives remains unknown. We know that Samuel was a Nottinghamshire farmworker, then a soldier (including a period spent in Ireland) and a cooper and distillery worker during his time in Sheffield and London before he became a passionate Chartist. The writer's imagination has moved around and between these historical facts—and the contributions of other historical figures like the black Chartist, William Cuffay—and this play is the result.

The tunes used for the lyrics in the play come from many sources: 'The Charter Forwarding' is an adaptation of the 1981 Grenadian calypso by the Mighty Explorer, 'Grenada Forwarding'. The duet between Mary and Samuel has as its tune the Mozambican melody, 'Africa em luta'; 'It's Our Land' is based upon the jazz tune 'Midnight', recorded by the American saxophone player Benny Carter in the 1940s. 'Here We Go!' is, of course, the miners' anthem of their 1983-4 strike, based on the old march, 'Blaze Away!'.

There are shades of other events and historical processes throughout the play. Whether English troops in Ireland in the 1830s put a shamrock in their cap for every Irishman killed, I don't know, but certainly British occupying soldiers in Aden in the late 1960s awarded each other golliwogs for every Yemeni soldier they killed, as they futilely sought to suppress the Yemeni nationalist movement. The history of British imperialism is full of such habits and moments. The words ascribed to Samuel Holberry following the planning of the rising, come from a slogan that I read on a roadside billboard in Pinar del Rio, Cuba (where most of this play was written): 'Esto tiempo tiene su nombre'.

The photographs interwoven into the play's text of the 2008-9 school children's re-enactments of the November 1839 Chartist insurgency in Newport, South Wales, were taken by one of Britain's finest documentary photographers, my friend Ron McCormick, a Liverpoolian who has lived in Newport for 45 years. We first met in Stepney, East London in 1970, when we collaborated on the publishing of a collection of my school students' poems, *Stepney Words*. Now, 53 years later, we are still working together, inspired by the boldness and creativity of young people.

Finally, I am indebted to the mountain of loving work and research done over many years by the Holberry Society in Sheffield, and in particular to the

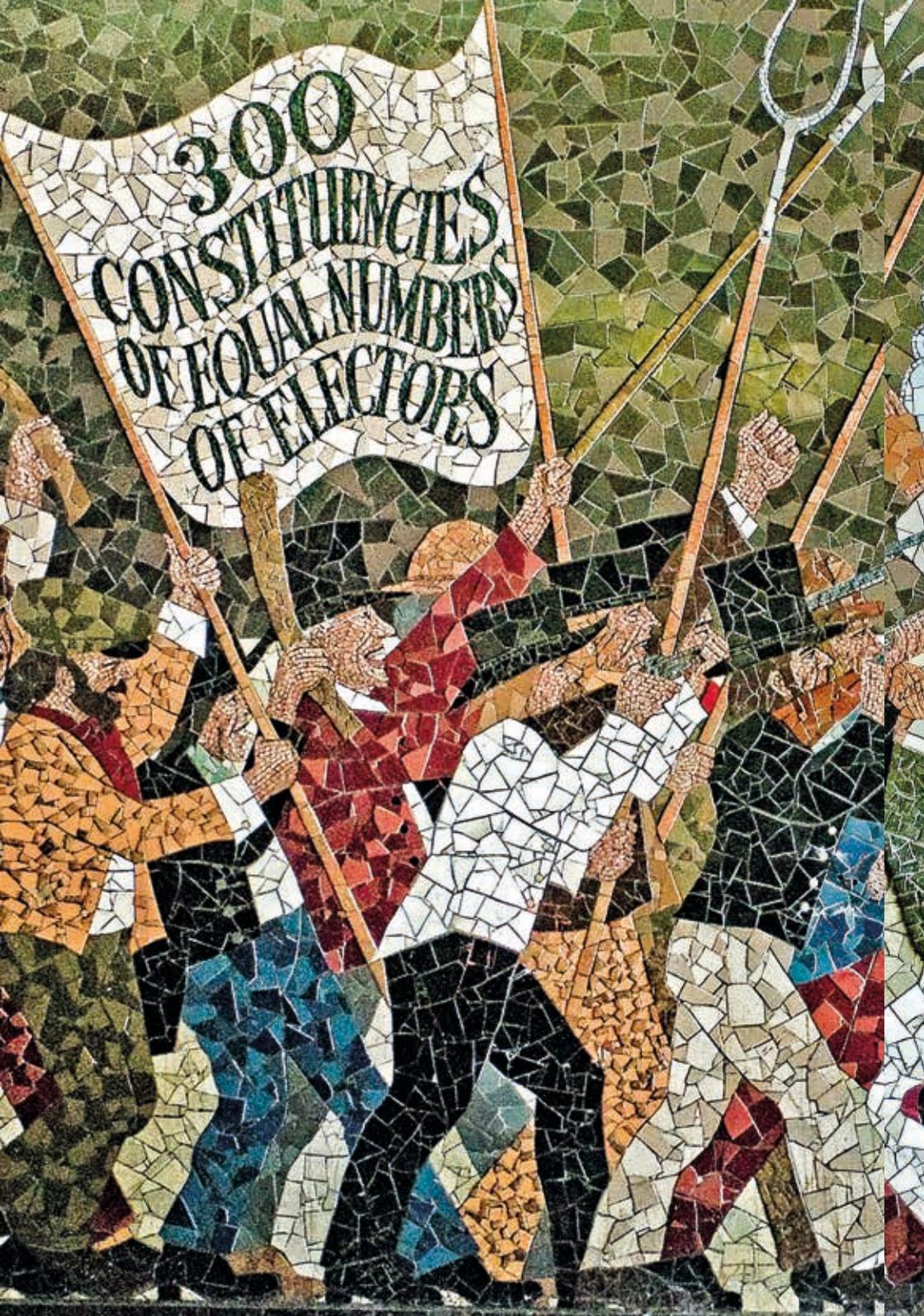
published articles and pamphlets of two of its stalwarts, John Baxter and Bill Moore. It is to Bill Moore, an outstanding Sheffield labour historian whose work has opened up the Holberrys' lives to me, that this play is dedicated. As he wrote of his home city in the final two sentences of *History from Below*, his life story: *'I know of no city anywhere in the world whose citizens have a finer history of unremitting struggle, yet our children are taught none of it. So here's to the day when they will all know!'*

*Chris Searle*

# **Holberrys**

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300  
CONSTITUENCIES  
OF EQUAL NUMBERS  
OF ELECTORS





## List of Characters

SAMUEL HOLBERRY

MARY HOLBERRY

WARDEN

MARTHA HOLBERRY, Samuel's mother

FARMER

RECRUITING SERGEANT

CORPORAL

THREE FARMWORKERS

ELLEN, a young countrywoman

THREE SOLDIERS, including JACK STEWART

IRISHMAN

Young IRISHWOMAN

WILLIAM CUFFAY, a prominent Chartist

BARRACKER

PARSON

JAMES BOARDMAN, a bricklayer

THOMAS BRADWELL, a painter

JAMES McKETTERICK, a brushmaker

PETER FODEN, a baker

JAMES ALLEN, a publican

Mr. BLAND, Chief Constable of Rotherham

An OLD MAN

A young GIRL

VOICE OF GEORGE JULIAN HARNEY, a Chartist leader

Irish people, Sheffield Chartists, soldiers and mourners

All the characters are played by prisoners of Northallerton Prison, who don hats, scarves, jackets, helmets, shirts and collars, and carry hoes, spades, guns, placards and baskets to play farmworkers, wardens, soldiers, Irish rebels and country people, Chartists, Sheffield workers, churchgoers and mourners through the play in the manner of the Pierrot troupe in Joan Littlewood's production of *Oh, What a Lovely War*.

There is a five-piece band: trumpet or trombone, clarinet/saxophone, bass, drums and guitar.



## Act 1

*SAMUEL HOLBERRY is at stage left, turning a treadmill which dominates the left side of the stage throughout the course of the play. MARY HOLBERRY stands stage right in a cottage doorway in front of a nineteenth century industrial backcloth. As she delivers the Prologue she steps forward pointing towards SAM.*

### PROLOGUE



MARY

In Northallerton Prison a brave man treads the mill.  
He is my husband Samuel—  
Jailed for his love of the people,  
The ordinary people  
The people who work for their children,  
Those who struggle for their bread—  
To me they are all Holberrys.  
For Samuel is one of them,  
Will always be one of them,

His mind as sharp as the Sheffield knives they grind  
His will as hard as the iron which is their base  
His heart as warm as the daily love they make.  
This is his story, this is their story.

He was an ordinary man, I was an ordinary woman,  
But we loved each other in the way that humans do,  
And we loved our people with the  
Charter's promise—  
And much more besides.  
For no matter what we did,  
Despite the mistakes we made,  
Beyond the hatred that we sometimes showed  
For those whose bitter cruelty we suffered,

Besides the impatience that burst out from us  
(For it's not easy, that's for sure,  
To make a break for freedom)  
We were our people, and they were us.

From all climes, from many far-flung lands—here!  
Now on this one struggling piece of earth  
Which we must all change for the better.

For we are one, all of us.  
The one of us, the two of us,  
All of us, our people, our learning future—  
Holberrys, all of us.

*MARY returns to stand in the doorway as SAM treads on, turning the wheel. ENTER a WARDER, who listens as SAM talks to himself.*



SAM All day long I turn this wheel. Like the fast-going minutes of my life it turns, pulling up my memories, making me think of my life. Was it worth the pain, this struggle we had? All for the Charter, to bring betterment for our people here in England—not for me, not even for Mary, but for our children and their children’s children.

For me, so far from home, the turning wheel turns on, bringing back my days as a child in Nottinghamshire fields, on the ground where Robin Hood walked and shot his arrows of justice. That’s where I begin, come with me, ride on this wheel.

WARDER Stop talking to yourself Holberry, you’re driving yourself mad. You’re not going anywhere. Now you tell me what your precious Charter can do for you now.

SAM It can still free me—it can free you too if only you’d read it and understand it, instead of living the slave’s life of orders that you live now.

WARDER            Oh, and who's the slave then, eh? And as for orders—where would the world be without orders? It would fall apart if we weren't told what to do and didn't do it. Look what happened to you for being a bloody rebel.

SAM                But that's it! Can't you see who the real slave is? What happened to me and my comrades wouldn't happen to anyone if what we had planned worked out. Where's the crime in freedom?

WARDER           Ah, tread your wheel man—and just as long as I've got nothing to do but sit here and watch you, then I'll listen to your story. And you'll pardon me if I sleep or if I spit.

SAM                Then let my words turn the wheel. It's rolling down England, across all the counties and cities, so don't get in its path. It's rolling first to Nottinghamshire.

*BLACKOUT*

SCENE 1: A field near the village of Gamston in Nottinghamshire, 1832

*SAM (as a youth) pushes the plough across the field, puffing and gasping behind a shire horse.*

SAM                    Come on Amy, keep pulling, keep going girl, we've got to finish this field by this evening. I know it's hard girl, it's hard for me too, but keep on going.

*Sam's mother, MARTHA appears, calling out to her son.*

MARTHA              Sam, here's your food lad, you'll need this.

SAM                    (*Resting the plough and settling the horse*). Thanks Ma, I can do with this today, I can tell you.

MARTHA              I know son—look, there's some extra bread and cheese there to help you keep going.

SAM                    (*Sitting down and beginning to eat*) You know Ma, this is a killing life, this is. I don't know how long I can go on with it. Like we pour sweat on the poor horse, shouting, swearing, pushing him on and on until he drops and becomes raw meat—so the farmers do the same to us. When will it end Ma?

MARTHA              I can't answer that son, but I know it will end some day. The people of England can't take this for ever, and they won't take it for ever either. When I brought you in to this world I didn't bring you for this! Ploughing earth, planting turnips, baling hay— It wouldn't be bad if we got fair pay. I wanted you at school, learning to be wise With books all around you—not just cowdung and flies! The pain I had for you, from the moment of your birth Was to see you, and all us farm people, rise up from the earth.

SAM                    I know that Ma, but all I want now is to feel young, feel my power, feel strong and know that I'm a man, not just a farmer's boy. I'm growing strong, my arms are firm like steel— But Ma, if only you knew how I feel. Inside I'm so angry, Inside I'm red like last night's sky. I need to do something

before my life goes by.  
I need to know myself and my strength, I need others to  
know it too. I need to use this power, I need to spread this fire.

*Enter FARMER, on a horse.*

FARMER            Your fire boy? Any fire in your belly belongs to me, just as  
your whole working life belongs to me. And if you want to  
get paid for it, you'd better work for it and not talk for it.

There's a field, there's a shire, there's a plough—and there's  
you. Put them together boy, it's with them that you belong for  
ever. That's the best and only place for your strength—working  
for me.

SAM                One day, if only I could show you...

MARTHA           No Sam, hold it now and put your arms to the plough. The  
words will only get you into trouble. Save them, they will  
wait for you until you need them. They will be true to you,  
and there will come a time.

FARMER           Remember Holberry—by sunset I want all this field in  
beautiful grooves. Now, that will be something to be really  
proud of boy. Make it look like a brown, beautiful sea and  
then you can go sailing away on it to find yourself, can't you?

*EXIT FARMER*

SAM                Ma, I feel like finishing with all this—for two pins I'd finish  
with him too. If you knew how the anger bites and boils like  
stew inside me, like one of the stews you make for us.

MARTHA           And just to show you that I love you Sam, you'll have one  
tonight with your father and brothers—all that meat and  
those vegetables loving each other together. You'll need all  
that inside you after you've finished today.

*(A sound of drumming in the distance gradually gets louder.)*

Now what's this racket coming down the road. God, don't let  
it be what I think it is, it's already had one of my boys.



*ENTER SERGEANT and CORPORAL playing a snare drum, followed by several young farmworkers who march in time to the drum along the road at the side of field. The SERGEANT sees SAM and shouts over to him.*

SERGEANT      Hey lad, you want to grow up quickly? You won't do it pushing that plough now, will you? You want to be a man quick? Come with me and these lads here—they know what's good for them. You can't be a man trampling around in that field now, can you? Even the horse comes in front of you. Come with us to the village green—and then come with us to glory!

SAM              *(Dropping the plough handle and stepping towards the SERGEANT).* You can give me that? Then I'm coming.

MARTHA        *(Stretching after him)* Sam, don't go! It's not what you want. It's not what you think it'll be. It won't be your power, only somebody else's telling you lies about how strong you are. Sam... Sam...

Who'd be a mother today?  
Who'd have children and see them whipped away?  
What kind of life is it when the poor have no say?  
The farmers and the generals  
The bosses and the squires—  
It's their words that count  
While we stick fast in the briars.  
Liars Sam, all of them liars!  
The richest of them leeches!  
Sam, Sam, they'll deceive you with their speeches,  
Their talk will only burn,  
They'll roast you in their ovens of words—  
But... perhaps you need to learn.

*EXIT MARTHA after SAM, her head shaking.*

*BLACKOUT*

SCENE 2: The village green in Gamston

*A group of young farmworkers, men and women, crowd around the SERGEANT and CORPORAL. SAM joins them.*

FIRST FARMWORKER

Look at his jacket, that red and white would put the fear of God and the King in any African.

SECOND FARMWORKER

And those boots... I'd do anything, go anywhere to get a pair like that. I could kick the guts out of anyone with them on.

THIRD FARMWORKER

And they'd kick the balls off any coolie, they would.

SAM

Look at that gun... if we had them, the Irish would run like frightened hares from us. We'd scatter them, we would.

FIRST FARMWORKER

And the women everywhere we passed would flock like ewes to us. They'd be begging to go with us.

YOUNG WOMAN

You'd be lucky—who'd want to look at you, in a uniform or in your birthday suit.

SECOND FARMWORKER

Watch it you! I'd like to see the farmer who would dare to come near us if we were in a uniform like that.

THIRD FARMWORKER

Farmers? We'd make them all push their own ploughs, with their arses digging the earth!

SAM

This is it! This must be it! This is the strength I've been looking for, the pride my Ma wants for me... (*He turns towards the audience.*) It is, isn't it?

*The SERGEANT AND CORPORAL come forward, with the young men and women both sides of them, to perform the Recruitment Rap.*





Irish, black, Chinese or brown  
We don't mind, we'll mow them down.  
We're the Empire boys, we're patriots all—  
Come up against us and you're a fool!

English lads, now come and be proud,  
Wave the colours and shout out loud,  
'The world belongs to the Englishman  
From the River Nile to Afghanistan.'

We'll make you glad that you're a man,  
Strong and tough to make a stand  
Against all foreigners, near or far—  
The Empire boys, that's who we are!

Come and join us, the Empire lads,  
Our guns will thrill you, make you glad—  
You'll feel that you're a hundred foot tall,  
This uniform will fit you all.

You'll go to the Punjab, Jamaica and the Cape,  
You'll fight and shoot and kill and rape—  
What a life, my lads, what a time of fun  
To make those natives turn and run!

We're the Empire boys, you can tell from our swagger  
From the Falkland Isles to the Gulf of Dacca,  
So get yourself out of this life of dross—  
Take the King's shilling and come with us!

*The young men in the crowd cheer and clap. SAM particularly is jumping up and down with a huge enthusiasm.*



SAM                    That's it! This is what I've been waiting for, this is for me. Where do I sign up?

SERGEANT            Right here lad, right here. If you can't write, then just put an X.

FIRST FARMWORKER  
Find me a pen someone, quick!

THIRD FARMWORKER  
Jack—run and tell Ma I'm going. I'll write to you all from Hindustan.

SERGEANT            Keep on coming boys, what a life waits for you all. You'll see the world and a half, I'm telling you now!

*From out of the crowd a young woman, ELLEN, steps forward. Full of confidence and anger, she pushes the SERGEANT aside.*

SERGEANT            Hey, hey, hey—what the bloody hell do you think you're doing? I'll have your guts for garters for that, my girl.

ELLEN

*(Addressing the young men of the village)* Listen all of you. What have you just heard from these snakes in uniform? Gobbledegook is the word! Nonsense the message! Cant and lies is what he's telling you! All you'll get from him is death, orders and tyranny—and you'll be killing other people just like yourselves too. Don't believe a word of it. You're workers of the land, you must know horse shit when you smell it. Well smell it well, it's right in front of you and you know how its stinks. *(She points to the SERGEANT.)*



SERGEANT Be careful, my girl—there are a lot of ships going to Barbados, chock full with the likes of you! And there are sex-starved convicts in Sydney who need wives. You're just the sort they're drooling for.

FIRST FARMWORKER Sit down Ellen! You'll get into trouble, you know.

THIRD FARMWORKER Stupid cow, she's always shooting off her mouth.

SERGEANT Take the advice, my girl—or I'm warning you, I'll arrest you.

ELLEN            Yes—threaten me like cowards,  
Send me to Australia, to Guiana or Singapore,  
But you can't hide the truth,  
You're putrid, you're liars to the core!  
Under your uniforms, just like me,  
You've got the skin and bones of the poor!  
Under your fading colours you're nothing more.  
Doing the filthy work for the King and the rich—  
Dying, rotting in a desert, blown up in an Irish ditch.  
Call me a country whore  
Call me a bumpkin and a bitch—  
But I know the line they're selling you.  
And as far as the truth goes  
There's not a stitch!  
Somaliland, Trinidad, Dublin or Lahore—  
Don't let them send you, boys,  
Or your mothers and girlfriends'll not see you anymore!

SERGEANT        Don't take no notice of her lads, she's cracked, gone in the  
head. There's always one like this—usually a bloody woman.  
Remember it's men we're after, not little boys on the end of  
their mummies' apron strings or their big sisters' tongues.  
You'll meet women boys, lovely women—they're waiting for  
you all over the world, and they're nothing like her.

Ain't it all worth it now, just for your name on a bit of paper?

*The young men, including SAM rush up to the SERGEANT, excited  
and exclaiming, almost crushing ELLEN as they push past her.*

SERGEANT        Hey, one at a time boys, one at a time. We'll soon be  
teaching you a little bit of discipline, you know!

*BLACKOUT*

*MARY comes forward and speaks directly to the audience.*

MARY            So Sam joined up officially at Doncaster in March 1832.  
Three years he spent in the Army, thinking that there was  
the place where he could truly become a man.

And what did he do?



He was ordered to turn his gun and bayonet against his own people. He was paid to do that and that is exactly what he did. For what is a soldier in the British Army but a bully for the monarch? So he bullied and killed our people campaigning for the right to vote after the Reform Act left all us working people out in the cold. He helped to smash the trade union men at Derby—when all they wanted was for ordinary people like ourselves to work together to make a new England of justice and liberty. What! The powers that be couldn't abide that. In short, Sam became a servant for the rich and powerful against the poor of England—people just like himself.

And then there was Ireland. Of course, he was sent there—the oldest colony, the true testing ground for the British soldier. You couldn't be a real British soldier if you hadn't killed at least one Irishman. So Sam was sent to crush the rebellion of the Ribbonmen. Oh yes, he learned all about the good old British Empire—over there, in Ireland, where it started and where it will finish.

SCENE 3: Rural Ireland, 1833

*ENTER SAM with three soldiers. They watchfully approach the cottage of an Irish family, spreading out to cover each other.*

FIRST SOLDIER

This is the place. The informer said that this was the place where he lived.

SECOND SOLDIER

Well let's get in there and flush the bastard out then, before his mates come.

THIRD SOLDIER

And let's sort the rest of his family out too while we're at it. They're just as bad, sheltering him. They know what to expect.

SAM

Hang on lads, it's him we want, not his children. They're bound to protect their father—you would, wouldn't you?



FIRST SOLDIER

You're too bloody soft Holberry. Your attitude's going to get us all killed. One less Irishwoman, one less bloody breeding machine for rebels and Ribbonmen. Let's drag them all out.

SECOND SOLDIER

I'm going in. I ain't waiting no longer!

*SECOND SOLDIER kicks the door and barges through. From inside there are screams and the sound of blows. An Irishman comes leaping through the open doorway, followed by the SECOND SOLDIER.*

FIRST SOLDIER

Get him Holberry, shoot the bastard, don't let him get away!

*SAM aims and fires. The Irishman falls forward, shot in the back. He writhes on the ground.*

THIRD SOLDIER

That's another one down—good shooting Sam, that's another shamrock for your cap son. Let me go and finish the paddy off.



*THIRD SOLDIER walks over to the wounded Irishman and shoots him in the head.*

FIRST SOLDIER

There's the job finished.

SAM

What did you want to do that for? We could have taken him prisoner.

SECOND SOLDIER

Too much bloody bother.

FIRST SOLDIER

Watch out Holberry, here comes one of his family—it could be his missis. Watch she don't go for you.

SAM

*(Watching the woman walk over to the dead man)* That's the first one, do you know that? The first one. I often wondered how it would feel. I'm all numb Jack, as if I've got no senses left in my skin. I can't feel anything.

FIRST SOLDIER

You won't have anything left to feel if you don't get a grip of yerself. Keep your eyes open Holberry. They're all around us.

SECOND SOLDIER

Don't worry son, we all feel like that when we kill our first one. You'll get used to it. Look at her—let her do all the feeling for you. You just do your job.

SAM

I never wanted this... she could be my own sister... she must be the same age.

FIRST SOLDIER

Holberry! Come on man, smarten yourself up.

*The YOUNG IRISHWOMAN comes forward and addresses SAM and the other British soldiers.*



#### YOUNG WOMAN

This man you killed was my brother,  
He loved me as his sister, as his childhood companion.  
And he loved his country too.  
The blood that ran like fire through his body,  
That blood that you burst open  
Runs through our country too—  
Through its hills and villages,  
Its cornfields and potato fields,  
Along its streams and in its waves  
That lap the sand on its beaches,  
Through its earth on which our children run.  
They run towards you, British soldiers  
They keep on coming, British soldiers  
Until you are vanquished, until you are gone—  
And they will be running towards you  
For centuries to come!

#### FIRST SOLDIER

Watch out boys! They'll be coming out of the houses all  
around.

SECOND SOLDIER

Better get out of here quick—they're grouping round that corner, there's scores of 'em.

SAM

*(Directly to the YOUNG WOMAN)* I had to do it, don't you see? Why must you rebel... why can't you accept us?

THIRD SOLDIER

Holberry! You bloody idiot, you want to get us all clubbed in? Come on, we're falling back, getting out of here fast. Don't hang about, they'll bloody chop you up. *(He pulls Sam, who is still dazed, backwards.)*

FIRST SOLDIER

Let's go boys. We'll make sure we'll get the regiment back here to clear this lot out.

*The SOLDIERS and SAM withdraw. From all points of the stage the figures of Irishmen and Irishwomen appear. Several of them pick up the dead man. They make a semi-circle towards the front of the stage. They begin to sing, at first quietly, gradually getting louder.*



It's our land,  
No one can take it from us, Ireland,  
Its soil is part of us, Ireland,  
Its flesh and bone are from us, Ireland,  
And it will be our children's too.

It's our land,  
Its earth comes out to us, Ireland,  
Its valleys beckon to us, Ireland,  
Its air gives breath to us, Ireland,  
And it will be our children's too.

It's our land,  
Its meadows freshen us, Ireland,  
Its rocks give strength to us, Ireland,  
Its love will nourish us, Ireland,  
And it will be our children's too.

*MARY comes forward to the front of the stage.*

MARY            Sam came home on leave from the Army in 1835. He seemed like a very different young man. Something had happened to his spirit—it was as if something inside him had snapped, deep, deep within him.

SCENE 4: Gamston, Nottinghamshire, 1835

*MARTHA is hoeing in her vegetable garden. ENTER SAM, his uniform unkempt, his appearance lethargic. He stops five yards short of MARTHA.*

SAM           Ma—look who’s come home.

MARTHA       Sam, is it you? *(She runs to him and hugs him.)* Thank God you’re safe and well. I’ve been waiting, waiting, waiting, all of us have. It seems like a lifetime since you went away like that.

SAM           Where’s Dad?

MARTHA       He’s out in the fields—I’ll go and call him...

SAM           No, hold on Ma. I need to talk to you alone before I see Dad and the others. He’ll want me to tell him about all the great things I’ve done and the places I’ve been—just like his brothers and my brothers who were soldiers before me. I don’t think I could stand that.

MARTHA       It’s only because he’s proud of you Sam. You’ve got to remember that.

SAM           Yes, I know that Ma. But you see, I’m not proud of myself at all. And what I’ve done makes me feel sick.

MARTHA       Well, what is it Sam? What have you got to tell me?

SAM           *(Embracing Martha)* I never thought I’d feel it, wearing this cursed uniform. I thought it would make me, build me up, make a proud Englishman of me. But Ma, it’s only brought me shame, shame inside. I can’t feel like a human being any more. What we did in Ireland was terrible—I can’t forget, I can’t forgive myself. I killed people—ordinary country people like you, Dad and the family. And all they wanted was what we want, their country for themselves and their children, just like we want ours.

MARTHA       Well Sam, perhaps you had to learn about the wickedness in the world that way, like thousands and thousands of others. But don’t blame yourself, you’re not alone.



SAM                    But who else is there to blame but me? I killed the Ribbonman in Ireland. I shot him in the back like a coward. I clubbed down trade unionists in Derby as if they were skittles. I could hear their skulls bruising and cracking. And do you know what it's like to feel your bayonet going in to someone's flesh Ma? You feel like it's your own—and it was me doing these things. No one else.

MARTHA              But who gave these orders?

SAM                    It doesn't matter Ma, it was still me.

MARTHA              But it does matter! It's exactly what matters. They used you! That uniform you're wearing isn't your uniform. You're a working man, an ordinary Englishman. The Army is led by the rich and kills for the rich—it takes the land from the poor so the rich can become richer, over here or in Ireland. You wouldn't listen to me before Sam, you had to find out for yourself. And it was painful—but thousands have done it your way. So now you know what 'King and Country' really means and why they make the ordinary soldiers do such terrible things to our people—and other people all over the world.

SAM                    It just didn't seem that way, you know, that day on the village green...

MARTHA             It never does Sam.



SAM                    Yes Ma—I understand all that now, and I also know that you realized it all along.

MARTHA             Sam, you are my youngest. Remember your brothers who went before? And all your uncles on your Dad's side? I had to learn the painful way too. I've seen it too close too many times not to have learned from it. Thousands of mothers have seen it, and wives and sisters.

SAM                    Look Ma, I've got to get out of it—if not, I'll desert. I can't go on, knowing what I'm doing to people. I'll go mad if I stay in.

MARTHA             Sam, you know that once you're in, you're in and there's only one way out. You'll have to buy yourself out. Have you saved any of your pay?

SAM                    Only a tiny bit. The money just seemed to slip through my fingers, like my life itself.

MARTHA                Sam—stop feeling sorry for yourself. You're only just twenty one. Your life's just beginning, so don't speak like that. You can't make one mistake ruin your life.

                              Listen, your Dad and I will get you out. We've got a little savings put by. We'll find the twenty pounds that you need, don't worry. We saved it for you, and somehow I guessed that we might have to use it this way.

SAM                    And I've been thinking some more. I'm not coming back to the land. I feel like I've outgrown it. It's not that I've turned my back on country people—they're the soul of England. But I've got to move on. I'm going to try life in a city and get a job there. I think that's where the future is for me.

MARTHA                So you'll be going to Nottingham then?

SAM                    No, I'm going to try Sheffield. I went there once with the Army when we had to stop a Chartist meeting there.

MARTHA                Ah, the Chartists—they're brave people Sam, they're looking to the future of ordinary people like us.

SAM                    That's true Ma, and I'm going to find out more about them. But Sheffield now, that's a great city in the growing, full of new workshops and factories, shining with cutlery and steel—and full of new citizens like I'll be.

                              And the people there are full of fire, full of rebellion. They say that if there'd been an English Revolution like the French Revolution, then it would have started in Sheffield because the people were ready for it! That's what I'll do, I'll find work there and live there—I'll make a new start, a new life.

MARTHA                But don't forget to come back and see us Sam, you won't be so far away.

SAM                    Ma, I'll always come back, you know that.

MARTHA

*(Moving towards the house)* Then let's go and make sure we can buy you out the Army then, come on. Or there'll be no new life for you!

*BLACKOUT*





SCENE 5: Northallerton Prison

*SAM and his fellow prisoners are picking oakum. The WARDER approaches SAM and begins a conversation.*

WARDER        Picking oakum eh, Holberry? Well it must be a little bit easier than that treadmill, no more round and round and round, eh?

SAM             Well it's strange, you know. These old ropes that we pick apart could have been the very bonds which have held us tight all through our lives, like chains they were, and now we're picking them to pieces and giving us more and more freedom—just like the Charter, for ordinary people all over England—you too, you know, if you'd only realize it.

WARDER        Me? I've been free all my life.

SAM             You have, so what makes you so different? You serve the rich and powerful, like we all do.

WARDER        Not me, I'm free I tell you. My father wasn't though. He came over from Ireland and was a docker in the East End of London, down Wapping. Terrible life that was and my brothers are still doing it. They get up before dawn, and go down to London Docks, wait for hours in the cold and never know when they're going to be taken on for a few pence a day if they're lucky, working in those holds with the cranes and pulleys which crush your legs. What kind of life was that? So I went in to prison work—Pentonville first, then Armley in Leeds, and now Northallerton—I've got about, you know.

SAM             Yes—from jail to jail, just like us!

WARDER        Ah, but I go out every night to my wife and children, I'm free as a sparrow. That's the difference, I can get out.

SAM             Until you try to make your life better, then you've got walls all around you, just like us. Just like the family in Ireland that your Dad left behind—I know, I was there, I saw how they suffered and starved and how we killed them. They

had no food you know, all their potatoes were diseased.

WARDER Ah Holberry, they're all coming over here now, taking our jobs, building the railways—everywhere there's navvies. We see a lot of them in here now, troublemakers most of them!

SAM But they're your people, your Dad was one of them!

WARDER Not no more, Holberry, I'm English, born and bred and there aint nobody can take that away from me, nobody!

SAM But the Charter's for ordinary English people too like you and me and it will give us the rights we've dreamed of.



WARDER

Not me Holberry, not me! I'm staying with this system, it's done me alright. Now get going with that oakum before my gaffer sees me talking to you. He'll think I'm making it easy for you, and then I'll be in the shit!



SAM

Just like me you mean, don't you? Can't you see it's the same for you!

WARDER

You think about that when you're freezing in your cell tonight Holberry! Just think about it!

SAM

No, if you want to know what I think about, I think about my wife Mary, and our darling son. Our son died you know, another Sam—Samuel John, a little Sam, and I was here, like a million miles away! I couldn't be with my Mary to help and comfort her, to hold her in my arms when she needed me. How do you think that makes me feel, alone, every night?

WARDER

I'm sorry Holberry, really I'm sorry. I know you're a rebel, but you're an honest man too and I'd help you if I could. I can't... I won't, and that's the truth.

*(He turns to the audience)*

I'll go on keeping things just the way they are,  
The way they're going to stay.  
Listen—those arseholes who rule us,  
They ain't going to go away!

It's true that I don't like them,  
I can't stand their snobbish ways  
Their big houses and their money  
Their posh schools and life of easy days.

Of course I'd like to see them crushed  
But that's my secret dream,  
I can't say that to anyone  
Or I'll be hanging from a beam!

But these Chartists aren't half brave  
I've got to admit it's true,  
And maybe one sweet far-off day  
This Holberry'll be proved true!

Shhh! Keep it quiet! And remember, inside every keeper of  
men is a keeper of dreams of freedom! Yes!

*(To the prisoners with their oakum)*

Now you lot, keep picking hard—and I don't mean your  
noses! I mean all this lovely oakum.

*(Lights dim)*

SCENE 6: At the Holberrys' kitchen table

MARY Sam, I never thought you'd come back. You know, I thought you'd got the London bug and you'd stay there forever. Not many people come back to Sheffield once they've been in London.

SAM How could you think that, Mary? You know I'd always come back to where you are. You're my life, you must know that. I can't be alone, not without you, and London's a brutal place.



MARY (*pouring tea into Sam's cup*) Tell me more about it, Sam. I'm never going to go there, so your words will be my only picture.

SAM I used to go for walks some nights. I worked in the distillery in Lower Thames Street, just west of the Tower. But I'd walk east, into the docklands. Mary, the mess and the smell almost knocked me off my feet, but I had to see how people lived.

MARY Was it worse than here Sam, worse than Attercliffe?



SAM

*(rising from the table)* Rougher Mary, much rougher! The sailors wasting their money, the fights, the drunks, the pubs, the warehouses, the dens of opium. I walked up the Ratcliff Highway all the way past Shadwell Basin where the cocoa, wine, spices—all the things that the dockers unloading them could never afford to buy—to Blackwall and the East India Docks. I passed dockers waiting days and nights at the dockyard gates for work, seamen from everywhere, squads of Irish navvies, Jewish shops with kosher chickens hanging from their hooks, the French-speaking Huguenots with their mulberry trees for silkworms—and the West Indians fresh off the boats. The world is there, Mary, British workers from everywhere on the planet—the East India docks full of Lascars waiting for the next outward voyage. We have to struggle alongside all these people, they're just like us Mary, no difference between us, England and the world is full of all of us. I learned that in London, Mary.

MARY

You've got to tell people here about all that, Sam.

SAM

*(Sitting down)* I met one man in the Sun Tavern in Shadwell. He was a coal heaver, offloading tons of coal from the Thames barges, backbreaking work. He was a Sam too, like me. He was a black man who had been a slave in the West Indies island of Grenada. He'd been brought over to London by his master as his personal lackey. But he'd escaped and even though the peelers were after him, he'd been passed from worker to worker, family to family, house to house until he had won his freedom. He learned to read and write, married an Irish girl called Tracey and now he helps run the Coal Heavers' Union and his mates love him—I saw it!

That's what I learned, Mary. I learned what's right for us all—that's solidarity, sticking with each other, never turning our backs on each other. That's why I'm a Chartist, Mary. That's what I learned.

FADE OUT





## Act 2

### SCENE 1: In Northallerton Prison

*SAM stops picking oakum and steps forward to address the audience under a spotlight. He is thoughtful, yet emphatic.*

SAM            I wanted to change this world  
                  This real place where I live,  
                  With Mary who made me.  
                  I came from Nottinghamshire farmfields  
                  From the country, damp and green  
                  From walking in  
                  The shit of animals  
                  The mush of vegetables.  
                  The recruiting sergeant came to our village,  
                  This shilling of death  
                  He made it sound  
                  What a man should do  
                  He didn't dip our brains in the blood  
                  Of the Irish people  
                  Who are our people  
                  But they made us drink it  
                  When we got there.  
                  They made us kill our own  
                  In that land of green  
                  We spilled blood on the green.  
                  We stared at the red.  
                  I couldn't stay there  
                  And kill my class.

                  So I came to this city  
                  'Sam, Sam live with me  
                  Make me with your comrades'  
                  Sheffield pleaded with me,  
                  And I wanted to work in its yards of brick  
                  To walk on its cobbles,  
                  To smell its smoke  
                  In Darnall and Attercliffe,  
                  To feel the heat of furnaces,  
                  To burn with passion,  
                  To make life's alloy

Like Sheffield's molten steel,  
To live in life's foundry  
And to change this world of classes,  
To melt the differences into one,  
A world for workers like us  
In cities built for us,  
Workers working and learning,  
Workers who live together,  
Who build across our hills  
The cities of our dreams and nightmares  
Linked by railways of love and hope,  
Our blessed England,  
England for all of us.  
"Long live the Charter!"  
We sang and we shouted  
As we trained with wooden guns  
And drilled along Sky Edge.



We planned our attack in the morning  
In the workshops of Eyre Street,  
But one of us betrayed our cause  
And they took us on the eve  
Of our redemption.  
So now on the treadmill  
And picking the oakum  
Alone in my murky Yorkshire cell  
I remember our England,  
Our land of free men and women  
Claiming the earth.  
Of a land where love walks among us,  
Not for me  
Not for my brothers and sisters  
Comrades of justice all,  
But somewhere for our children  
Our children's children's children  
A land of freedom budding  
Under the skin of hatred.  
Peel it off!  
Peel it off!  
You who are young  
Clasp arms with the old  
And peel it off!

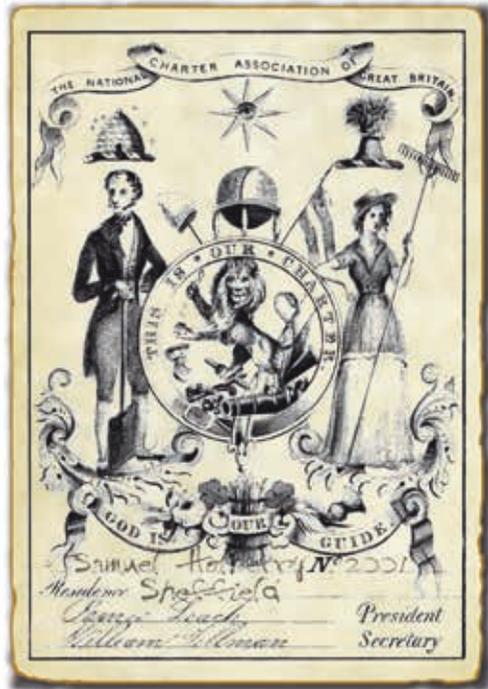
*MARY comes forward to address the audience.*

MARY

So Sam came to Sheffield and found work, first as a cooper and then in a distillery firm. Then I came into his life, and he into mine—and we became husband and wife. I was an Attercliffe girl but we found a little house to live in on Eyre Street.

It was a hard life too, but we were very happy together in our love and companionship. In 1837, the first year of Queen Victoria, we found no glory or cause for celebration. Sam was laid off and had to go to London to find work. He found out more about Chartism there too, and when he came back he was deeply committed to the movement, and pledged to build it up in Sheffield too.

When he returned to Sheffield in 1838, he was full to bursting of the Charter, and helped to organise meetings all over the city—but particularly in Paradise Square. Together we worked day and night to build up the movement and bring freedom for all our people a little closer...



SCENE 2: Sheffield, Paradise Square, 1838

*ENTER a group of CHARTISTS, carrying a banner. They set up a platform as local people begin to gather around. SAM jumps up on the platform.*



SAM

Dear brothers and sisters, Sheffields all. Today we have a great man to tell you all about the People's Charter. I want to introduce to you our comrade from London, and one of the true leaders of the struggle for justice and liberty of the ordinary people of England—William Cuffay.

CUFFAY

*(Taking his place upon the platform)* You see here standing before you a dedicated Chartist and a true Englishman. Why did I become a Chartist, I who am the son of slaves from Africa, of those whose blood ran with the juice of sugar on the West Indian island of St. Kitts? Born a West Indian and always a West Indian—a proud black man but I am a Chartist Englishman too!

I'm a tailor! I make jackets, coats and breeches, and I am from Chatham, Kent, in the very heart of the dockyards and the ships. And just like you I want my freedom from the accursed system we all live under.



Do you know, I was born in a ship bringing my parents to England? Born on the Atlantic, I was. On that same ocean where the captains of the slave ships threw overboard the rebel slaves who were my ancestors. Men and women who loved their freedom. For if freedom must come for white, it must come for black too—and brown, and yellow—and to find it and make it we must struggle together.

They call this place Paradise Square. When the European robbers and despoilers came to my parents' country, they also called it Paradise. They killed the Indian peoples who met them there, they ripped my people from their African

earth, chained them and brought them across a bleeding ocean to be slaves, to work for the plantation owners to make them rich.

So many died, so many suffered, yet this, they said, was Paradise! And now, here, there is a place called Paradise in Sheffield, where so many people live a hard and painful life. So, my friends of England, what is there, what can there be between us?

Why am I dedicated to this People's Charter? Firstly, it will at last bring us the vote, the secret vote for all working men so no one again can exclude us or squeeze and pressure us to give our vote to them. We ourselves, men without the curse of property can become Members of Parliament with a salary of our own. There will be Parliaments every year and an end to rotten boroughs and corruption, with every parliamentary district the same size.

These principles are what we fight for. They are only a beginning, but they can help to change our country into a better place for all working people like ourselves—and take it towards a true democracy where the country and all its wealth can belong to all of us!

*Cheers from the crowd. But within it a BARRACKER shouts.*

BARRACKER     How can you call yourself an Englishman with that black skin you wear? How's that?

CUFFAY         If you were to work in a coal pit or steelworks, would you not come out at the end of the day looking like me? If I were to work in a flour mill or cement factory would I not come out looking like you? Our struggle takes us beyond the skin, my friend. In the Charter we find unity, it belongs to all of us.

*Cheers again. The Chartist supporters in the crowd begin singing 'The Charter Forwarding' as CUFFAY takes hold of the banner and the crowd marches around the stage and EXITS, still singing loudly.*

The Charter forwarding  
The people moving on,  
All of England will soon be with us.  
The Charter forwarding  
The people moving on,  
Soon Queen Victoria, you'll be gone!







SCENE 3: At the Holberrys' house in Eyre Lane

*SAM, MARY and CUFFAY are eating supper.*

SAM           Where are you going next Will?

CUFFAY       Barnsley's next. I always laugh when I think of Barnsley.

SAM           Laugh? Why's that.

CUFFAY       You know what they call it, because of all the coal round there—'Black Barnsley'. You remember *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe?

SAM           We can't read very well, Will. I never went to proper school, I was straight onto the plough at Gamston.

MARY         Me too, my mum and dad never had the chance to get me to school, not round Attercliffe—you couldn't read books anyroad because of all the dust and smoke from the steel.

CUFFAY       Well, Defoe did a tour of England, and when he came to Barnsley, he called it 'Black Barnsley' with all the coal dust covering the buildings and the people—just like me, eh?

MARY         But don't you get fed up with all those comments—like that man in Paradise Square.

CUFFAY       Listen Mary, he's ignorant, never been to school either. Probably never been out of Sheffield—after all, there's plenty of work here. But it's when I get it from our leaders who are supposed to know a thing or two—that's when I get angry. One said to me last week, 'but Will, your people are not ready, you're not really developed enough, you haven't got enough experience'—that's what makes me angry. It's when they haven't read history, when they don't know but still speak nonsense.

SAM           Is that what they say to you?

CUFFAY       Yes, and worse, believe me. Think of my people in the Indies—it's only six years since they stopped being slaves

after all the revolts they waged: Sam Sharpe in Jamaica, Bussa in Barbados, Chubb in Tobago and the first and greatest of them all in Haiti—Toussaint! It was slaves who ended slavery! They rebelled through their bravery of course, but it was their huge brainpower too. Ceaseless revolts they made, year after year. Like Julien Fedon in Grenada, nobody over here knows about him. He was a mixed race plantation owner and rebel who had freed all his slaves before they all rose up and fought the British for a year in the peaks on the top of his island. Then he just disappeared, they never caught him and the people say he is still with them, every day rising with the sun, inspiring them to freedom, out of the mists.

That's what we need, knowledge! Schools for all our children, in all our cities, our towns, our villages, to teach our children about our real history, all over the world, so they can know! So they can read and write their own future!



MARY                    That's what we need Will, that's what we should be fighting for. Schools and knowledge. But you talked about the great rebel slaves—they were all like you. What about the women Will?

CUFFAY                You never heard of Nanny the Maroon in Jamaica? She's an example to all Englishwomen too. She led hundreds of escaped slaves who went into the hills—the Cockpit Country they called it because it was so well guarded, and they made their own villages of freedom, lived the lives of free people. Listen, who freed the slaves, not Wilberforce—he's a rich man, a banker, he doesn't like us Chartists, you know, but the slaves themselves, men and women like us Mary, and we have to learn from that. They're free because they organised!

SAM                     Yes man, that's why we're rising up.

CUFFAY                And you know Sam, we can win anywhere, as long as we have the support of ordinary people—just like the people here in Sheffield. Listen I found about it before I came up here. You know way back in the 1790s the Sheffield people made a big petition to finish with slavery for my people in the Indies, and just ten years ago there was a big, big house-to-house canvas of every house in Sheffield to make a ban on the purchase of West Indian sugar to stop all the cruelty of the plantation owners—and in 1833 they petitioned the King from here for an end to slavery without compensation to the plantocrats. That was the Anti-Slavery Society here in Sheffield, so you Chartists here have already got so much to be proud of! My people in the Indies know that they've got thousands of friends here!

SAM                     But what about here Will, too. Our country people are like slaves too, with the farmers and squires like plantation owners—I saw it all in Gamston, where I come from. Or the steelworkers and cutlery workers here or those in the Lancashire mill towns—like slaves they are!

CUFFAY                Not quite Sam, they don't have to fight against the race curse too!

You know, men in the crowd in Nottingham threw bananas at me, others called me the devil, said I was black like dirt. That's something else again Sam, something else.

MARY Ignorant Will, pig ignorant!

CUFFAY That's why we have to go beyond the skin to the brain to the mind, Mary. So people white and black can see who their real enemies are—not those who work side-by-side with them, but those who rule them, who keep them without food, good health and education, who take their lives like picked fruit and keep them crushed with their police and dragoons.

SAM Yes man—I know all about that. I was a soldier Will, a killer too I hate to say, in Ireland.

CUFFAY Ah, the first colony Sam, a long time before they did it to us! And it will be the last too, you can be sure of that. Anyway dear friends, I have to be gone for black Barnsley awaits! I can't let my own people down can I? The miners are my brothers! Thanks for your hospitality—true Chartist hospitality—I'm moving on. Until we win, my thanks and eternal strength!

*(He embraces them both)*

MARY We're always thinking of you Will; always and everywhere!

*(CUFFAY almost leaves the stage, then turns back)*

CUFFAY One more thing. When the British freed my people in the West Indies seven years ago, you know what they did? They made them 'apprentices', they said they weren't ready to be full and free men and women. Apprentices! Am I an apprentice tailor? An apprentice Chartist, an apprentice human being? That's what they want us to be now. They're saying my people aren't ready for freedom, they had to be apprentices! Let me tell you my friends, freedom is the first thing we're ready for. In my parents' island, St. Kitts, where the apprentices rebelled seven years ago, and here across England too. What, are they going to make us Chartists into

apprentices? No, never, never! We're free men and women and full men and women. Nothing less, nothing less!

*(With a wave, CUFFAY leaves the stage)*

*SAM and MARY are left on stage together. They sit together at the table.*

SAM                   Cuffay is a great speaker, Mary. He's a tremendous boost to the movement and has given us hundreds of new members because of his speeches.

You know, we're getting stronger every day—not just in Sheffield but all over the country.

MARY                Yes I know, Sam. But you know I have my doubts about it.

SAM                   I know, we've talked about them many times.

MARY                Are we women meant to be patient for ever, Sam? What does the Charter hold for us? what does it say to half the population of England? That there'll still be no vote for them? That they don't matter? It's a Charter just for you men.

SAM                   I know it seems that way Mary—but then why do you support it? Why do you and hundreds of other women work so hard for it?

MARY                *(Standing)* Because it's just one step towards progress for us. Even though it treats ordinary Englishwomen as if they are invisible, as if they aren't even there—I'll still work for it because it will bring us just a little closer to a better life. But the Chartists had better start listening to us women.

SAM                   But everything will come for women too. In time.

MARY                In time? What do you mean 'in time'? Do you think we have more time on our hands to wait than you? Do you think we live longer or can put up with all this without feeling the misery the same as you?

SAM                   I didn't mean that, I meant to say...

MARY

Then don't say it then. The sad truth is that we have to fight for our own rights even with Chartist men, even with our husbands. And if you men get the right to vote, where does it leave us women?

This great Charter for liberty—  
But what will the Charter do for me?

Free for the men, free for thee—  
But what will the Charter do for me?

Cook the food then make the tea—  
But what will the Charter do for me?

A vote for Peter, a vote for Paul—  
But what about the women who give their all?

Votes for men, wages for the M.P.—  
But what will the Charter do for me?

Work! Have children! House drudgery!  
But what will the Charter do for me?

"I love you darling" it will ever be—  
But what will the Charter do for me?

A Charter for he, but not for she—  
So what will the Charter do for me?

We'll fight to make it ours too, just wait and see!  
And then the Charter will be for me.

A women's Charter too, and equality—  
And then the Charter will be for me!

SAM

We'll fight to get the vote for you too—you know I've pledged myself to that, and thousands of other Chartist men think the same.

MARY

But how long Sam, how long? Most of the leaders don't care.

SAM

Then they'll have to do what we say. This is the people's

movement. We're not going to be like sheep and just follow them without minds of our own.

Listen—I'm not going to give up until we're all free and equal in England—and in Wales and Scotland and Ireland too, you know that Mary. And just like Cuffay said, it's the people in the rest of world too, I know that from Ireland. We've got to bring down the Empire and all it stands for.

MARY I know your willpower Sam. That's one of the reasons why I love you, why I married you.

SAM Willpower? You're the one that's got it, Mary, mountains of it—I couldn't keep going without you. (*SAM begins to sing quietly to MARY, using the Mozambican tune, 'Africa em Luta'.*)

As I love you  
The power that you give me  
Makes me love the people too.

MARY The people's love  
Makes me love you dearly  
So much it burns my heart.

SAM AND MARY Our love will make us free,  
The people, you and me...

MARY (*Standing over SAM*) But all this love, love—how can it truly be love when we are not equals? When what you and all the other Chartist men fight for excludes me and millions more like me, refuses to give us what you hope it will give to you?

SAM But you know that I don't believe that, Mary; that I believe we are equal in everything and what the Charter will bring us is just the beginning for women as well as men. And as we get the points of the Charter it will take us further down the road—for women too.

MARY I believe you Sam, I really do. But how can I have faith in your leaders. Did you hear what your man Harney said, it's





just the latest—listen to what he said, to men of course. (*Mary reads from a pamphlet on the table*) ‘Our task is not weep; we must leave tears to women. Our task is to act?’ did you hear that Sam? You act while we cry! We can’t do anything but never mind, we are good criers and wonderful weepers! How is that equal? How does that make us comrades of action? What respect is that?

SAM He’s wrong Mary, he’s so wrong. We have to change all that. And he doesn’t know you.

MARY But he knows hundreds of women like me, the women all around him that keep Chartism alive; those who cook the food, who wash their clothes and care for their children, who keep their homes warm, clean their homes, make their fires and scoop up the water and spice up their beds. All for their husbands. And those who work for the bosses too as buffers, shining the metal till their arms fall off, as seamstresses and laundresses, servants and cooks. It’s us Sam, us—we who serve the men, even those who make all the actions while we make the tears. Can you feel how us women feel when we hear such words from men who say that they’re on our side?

SAM I’d never say those things Mary, and thousands of others like me.

MARY But you’re part of a big, big movement Sam, the biggest that England has ever seen. When will it change, when will it let us in and give us our freedom too? We’ve been waiting just as long.

SAM We’ve got to make it change, Mary. Organisation and struggle are our only weapons and women must be at the centre of both of them, side by side with the men.

MARY Sam—you know we are young people, halfway through our twenties, we are, yet we seem to have lived so many lives already. I have another Holberry inside me, and what kind of life will it be for she or he, what kind of life? We are right at the beginning, we’re a whole working class moving on our journey and yet so far we’ve found nothing, nothing.

- SAM            No Mary, we've found each other, millions of us, and we'll fight for our children and our children's children's children and they'll come through a long time after us. Don't you believe me? You're carrying our future inside you.
- MARY          Of course Sam, of course. But sometimes it all seems so very far away, an age away and what we are doing is truly full of dangers.
- SAM            It's only as far as London to begin with, because that's where the masters are.
- MARY          They're here too Sam, right here in Sheffield and all around us. They're probably right in our midst too, right inside us their spies and informers—they can pay them anything. So be careful Sam, I couldn't lose you.
- SAM            Lose? We won't lose Mary, look at our millions, all working people like us. In this long, long struggle we won't lose...

*SAM and MARY reprise their song.*

As I love you  
The power that you give me  
Makes me love the people too.

The people's love  
Makes me love you dearly  
So much it burns my heart.

In this great city  
Of furnace and fire  
Of foundry and steel.

From the heat of Hell  
From the blazing molten metal  
Our love will spill.

Our love will make us free  
Every sparkling petal  
The people, you and me...

*(The song is gradually overwhelmed by the rising sound of 'The Charter Forwarding' from all sides)*

The Charter forwarding  
The people moving on,  
All of England will soon be with us.  
The Charter forwarding  
The people moving on,  
Soon Queen Victoria, you'll be gone!



SCENE 4: Inside a Sheffield Church

*There is the sound of a loud chorus of 'The Charter Forwarding' as a group of Chartists move into the church. They march down the central aisle and occupy the front pews. When they are settled, SAM rises and addresses the congregation.*

SAM                Brothers and sisters of Sheffield, we have come as working people and common Sheffielders, to take our rightful place in the eyes of God and in the eyes of other people. For the first shall be last, and the last shall be first!

*A huge cheer comes up from the Chartists in the congregation.*

PARSON            (*Approaching SAM*) What are you doing, my man? These pews in the front here are reserved for the great families of Sheffield, the respectable, decent people with standing—not for riff-raff like you. Give them up right now for your betters!

SAM                It's time you learned, Mr. Parson, that there is no one better than us. (*Big cheer*) We are working people, the blood-stream of this country. We, all of us, sit in the front row before God. In his eyes and in our eyes, all men and women are equal.

PARSON            (*Trying to deal with the cheer of all those in front of him.*) That is sacrilege! This church was not built for low-class scum like you. Get out!

SAM                Remember your own holy book, you hypocrite! The rich cannot pass through the eye of a needle to get into Heaven, yet they pass through this church's door and sit in reserved seats on the front row! God save the people! God save the people! God save the Charter! (*Cheers from the congregation*) Blessed be the poor—they will hunger and thirst after righteousness and we shall have righteousness, here and everywhere—the working people, the ordinary people, will inherit the earth!

*Loud cheers from all around the stage, then BLACKOUT, and 'The Charter Forwarding'.*

SCENE 5: Sheffield, the Holberrys' house in Eyre Lane, 1839

*ENTER SAM, JAMES BOARDMAN, THOMAS BRADWELL, JAMES McKETTERICK, PETER FODEN and JAMES ALLEN. They sit around the kitchen table.*

BOARDMAN That's it! They've gone to far this time, we can't let this tyranny go on. We've got to fight back!

BRADWELL Our Birmingham brothers were beaten like animals going to the slaughter, right in the middle of the Bull Ring.

McKETTERICK It's true, we can't go on like this, the troops and dragoons are stamping all over us in almost every city in the country. Now there's this Queen's proclamation to ban all night meetings.

FODEN We should use our torches to burn their arses!



SAM One million and a quarter signatures on our last petition, and the House of Commons still turns up its nose at us.

FODEN We need to bloody it a bit then for them, then they might listen to us. This cowardly ‘moral force’ approach by the leadership isn’t getting us anywhere.

SAM Well, things are getting worse for all of us, brothers. I’ve got Mary expecting—and now I’ve been thrown out of work because of the organising.

BOARDMAN And you know what angers me the most? Sixteen hours a day my Dad works, making the best knives in the world to be used by the rich everywhere—by Queen Victoria too and her pampered, idle class. We need to strike now and knock them off their pedestal!

SAM Hold on Jim, we’ve got to be organised, or everything we want will come to nothing. First, we’ve got to be armed to defend our meetings. Second, we’ve got to hold them out of town from now on, at places where the dragoons can’t get us.

BOARDMAN You heard what happened at the square today? A man used the word ‘biscuit’, saying that his family was so hungry that they didn’t even have a ship’s biscuit to eat. The soldiers arrested him—they said he was shouting for the people to take muskets and fight.

SAM *(Trying to quieten the meeting down as MARY enters, heavily pregnant)* Well, you see the situation all of us are in all over the country. The time of only peaceful protest, of this approach of ‘moral force’ that Feargus O’Conner and some of the other leaders are telling us to follow—it’s not getting us anywhere except straight into cowshit. The time is gone now, we’ve got to put it behind us. Listen now, this is what I’m getting at...

*SAM stands up and walks around the kitchen as he speaks.*

SAM ‘Be moral!’ they say, ‘be right, not wrong!’  
But the question we ask is, ‘For how long?’

When the Government has power, has money and the gun,  
For how long can our patience run?

Can 'moral force' take power from the strong  
Or will they keep it all along?

Can it make the factories ours,  
Banks, farms and Army and all its powers?

'Moral force' means slow (maybe never) evolution:  
But 'physical force' makes a revolution.

Can we wait comrades, can we wait an age?  
Or do we strike now to turn the page?

FODEN                    That's right Sam, it's what I've said we needed all along.  
physical force—fighting back, not letting them cut us down  
and roll all over us, resisting with our own weapons—it's all  
we've got left now.

MARY                    We'll we've shown how we can get the people organised.  
Hardly a soul in Sheffield celebrated the Queen's  
coronation. We had all the working people organised to  
turn their backs on it.

BRADWELL            But if we are going to start using weapons, then it's a new  
stage of our struggle—you know what it will mean if the  
dragoons catch us with them.

McKETTERICK        And we've got to train, we've got to know how to use them,  
and how to fight like a real people's army. You're an old  
soldier Sam, you'd have to help us do that.

SAM                    You know, after Ireland I swore that I'd never pick up a gun  
again. But now I know that I'd die for the Charter, and if I've  
decided that, then I'd kill for it too—anyone who tried to  
stop us forwarding it.

BRADWELL            That's good logic Sam. None of us can decide that and feel  
happy, but if we take this step then there's no other choice  
for us.

SAM Right. I've been thinking about this. We'll have to get what weapons we can, and make the rest. And we'll train at night, beginning next week, on Sky Edge. That way we can keep good watch. From there you can see the whole city, and we'll have plenty of warning if the dragoons come after us.

McKETTERICK Sky Edge it is.

SAM Listen, you remember what Harney said at Derby during his election speech last year. He was right, you know. I've got it right here (*He refers to a pamphlet which he pulls from his pocket*) Listen: 'Again I say, we are for peace, but we must have justice—we must have our rights speedily: peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must'—do you hear him! 'time was when every Englishman had a musket in his cottage, and along with it a huge flitch of bacon; now there is no flitch of bacon for there is no musket; let the musket be restored and the flitch of bacon will soon follow.' How about that?

FODEN Well, it's a long time since I had bacon for breakfast, that's for sure, with the eggs sizzling too!

SAM But you hear what he said—we all want peace, but we want justice too. And can we get justice without fighting for it? I don't think so, they'll never just give it to us. And he also said, listen, it's here, 'Arm for peace, arm for the rights for all, and the tyrants will no longer laugh at our petitions'.

BRADWELL That's right, you can hear them laughing at us now. How's a load of signatures going to knock them down?

ALLEN But think of the risks Sam, and what they'll do to us if they ever catch us.

SAM What's the alternative? Forever signing petitions and asking nicely? And the ruling class bamboozling us with their educated words and talk—all lies! We must have had enough of all that after all these years. How can this so called 'moral force' change that. They would have to have had morals to begin with. No, they've got us trapped in all that, as usual.

BRADWELL It's a big, big step Sam. Physical force, guns and all that means. Do you think that we're ready for it? In the end it will be against the Army, and you know all about that, what they'll do. Do you think that we've thought about it enough—you know, about what might happen.

FODEN Think? Think? We've done enough of that. It's time to really do something!

McKETTERICK Yes man, as I said before, Sky Edge it is! *(He stands up shaking his fist at the others)* Sky Edge it is!

SAM Tom, get the most faithful of us together, the most loyal and trustworthy. We can't take no chances. We know there are informants in the movement.

ALLEN Sam—do you really think that we're ready for this? You know that the leaders will never support us.

BRADWELL Do you want to play follow-your-leader all your life?

ALLEN No, but...



BRADWELL Listen Jim, we've got no choice, if we don't act now they'll squash us. You can see how they're building up to it.

ALLEN There's always a choice. We're thinking men and there are other peaceful roads to follow.

BRADWELL The road to massacre? The road to defeat and the loss of everything we've struggled for? None of us have decided upon this road without an awful lot of thinking.

McKETTERICK And you talk about peace—when do they ever give us any peace? It's attack, violence, more violence and death, that's what they give us.

SAM Well, let's have a final vote on it then—who's for Sky Edge?

*They all raise their hands immediately except ALLEN, who finally and reluctantly does too—the last hand to be raised.*

FODEN Long live the People's Charter! Long live free Englishmen!

MARY *(Indignantly)* And long live free Englishwomen too!

*BLACKOUT*

SCENE 6: Sheffield, Sky Edge at night, 1839

*ENTER a group of Chartists with some very basic and home-made weapons, holding open-flame torches and singing.*

CHARTISTS     Here we go  
                  Here we go  
                  Here we go  
                  Here we go for the people of England  
                  Here we go  
                  Here we go  
                  Here we go  
                  For the Charter is in our grasp!



Here we go  
Here we go  
Here we go  
There is nothing that can defeat us  
Here we go  
Here we go  
Here we go  
For our freedom is in our hands!

*SAM comes to the centre of the marchers and addresses them commandingly.*

SAM            We're preparing comrades! It won't be long now. The sun will soon be rising, the dawn of our freedom is coming. Long live the People's Charter! Prepare yourselves for the moment!

*The Chartists cheer, and marching away, they repeat the song.*

*BLACKOUT*

SCENE 7: The Holberrys' house in Eyre Lane, January 1840

*SAM, BOARDMAN, BRADWELL, FODEN, McKETTERICK, MARY (who is very pregnant) and ALLEN are seated around the kitchen table.*

SAM            Are we all here then?

FODEN        Everyone's arrived Sam.

SAM            Right comrades! All the preparations have been made. We strike on the night of January 11th.

ALLEN        What? So soon? Have all the communications with the other cities been made?

BOARDMAN    Of course. We're not going into this like amateurs or idiots. We're rising together—Sheffield, Barnsley, Dewsbury, Bradford—we'll show England that the North has people of iron. It's with those brave people of Wales and up here that the true heart of Chartism beats.

McKETTERICK From Nottingham to Newcastle we are ready. Jim has made his journeys to Newcastle and Sam contacted the men in Birmingham—they are all prepared to act on our word and deed.

SAM            Yes comrades, our first attack on the eleventh will be the signal. Our brothers from Attercliffe and Rotherham will be there to support us. These groups, alongside us, will make the strike.

BRADWELL    So what is the actual plan? Remember Sam, you are the man with the military experience—we're relying on you.

SAM            It's simple comrades. We seize the Town Hall in Waingate, then Tontine Inn in Exchange Street. These we must hold, for they will be our bases for the rest of the operation. As soon as we've taken them, we stop the mail coaches from setting off. When they don't arrive in Barnsley and Nottingham—that will be the signal for the brothers there to launch their attack. Soon all England will be behind us in the name of the Charter.

ALLEN           What about our weapons, where have we stowed them?

SAM             They are upstairs in our attic. We have grenades and fire bombs a-waiting, and the night-cats to set the dragoons' horses' hooves a-rolling and a-tumbling. We also have all the stakes ready to make the barricades around our fortresses.

FODEN          So we are all ready to move then, to strike our blow for the people of England?

SAM             This is the time: the time of our brain,  
The time of our muscle,  
The time of our trusting love.  
Dear comrades, let us make a pledge  
Like our ancestors, Robin of Loxley,  
Like the wilful peasants before us—  
The boiling men of Essex and Kent,  
Those of Jack Cade and Kett of Norfolk,  
Like our brave brothers of Tolpuddle—  
Now us, in the middle of England,  
Its heart, its mind and essence,  
For us, our hands forged as one,  
This time in which we are living  
Has our name written upon it—  
We shall not betray it!

*They clutch each other's hands over the table.*

*BLACKOUT*

*Out of the darkness, MARY walks to the front of the stage.*

MARY           But just as we have had our heroes,  
We have had our betrayers too—  
The faint hearts and turncoats,  
Those who sell the people's hopes  
For a few pounds, a small life of favours  
Or one short rung of power.  
Such a man was James Allen...

*BLACKOUT*

SCENE 8: At the quarters of the Chief Constable of Rotherham, January 1840

*Enter ALLEN accompanied by Sergeant STEWART. They approach the desk of the Chief Constable of Rotherham, Mr. BLAND.*

- STEWART        Mr. Bland Sir! I have an important matter here Sir!
- BLAND            *(Looking up from his desk)* What is it Sergeant? Can't you see I'm damned busy. We need to have a much more effective strategy against the Chartist scum. They're getting away with far too much.
- STEWART        Exactly Sir! That's exactly it, Sir. We have uncovered some very important information about the Sheffield Chartists, Sir.
- BLAND            Oh yes? And who's this man here?
- STEWART        His name is James Allen Sir. He's a publican from Rotherham.
- BLAND            Ah yes, Mr. Allen. You have already been of service to us involving the Chartists, I believe.
- ALLEN            That is correct Sir.
- BLAND            Well, Mr. Allen, what have you to tell us?
- ALLEN            I have news of a conspiracy Sir, and plans for an attack on certain parts of Sheffield city on the night of January 1<sup>st</sup>. The perpetrators are a group of 'Physical Force' Chartists led by one Samuel Holberry. I have been under cover in his group Sir.
- STEWART        What was that name? Say that man's name again.
- ALLEN            Samuel Holberry. He came to Sheffield from Nottinghamshire a few years ago. An ex-Army man.
- STEWART        Holberry, you say? I think I know that man Sir. I served with him in Ireland, against the Ribbonmen.
- BLAND            Really Sergeant? And what manner of a man is our Samuel Holberry?

STEWART      A strange one Sir, a very strange one. I remember once he killed an Irishman, he almost got us killed. He seemed to cry inside, as if his whole soul was hurt.

Very unstable he was. I always thought that he had desertion or rebellion inside him. He couldn't take it. He bought himself out in the end, he did Sir.

BLAND          Sounds as if he could be a dangerous character. Better get word to Lord Howard in Sheffield immediately, to have him arrested. Make sure to get all the details from Mr. Allen about his associates.

STEWART      (*Pleading to Mr. BLAND*) Let me do it Sir, let me arrest him. I know Holberry's ways—and we need to act very fast. If what Mr. Allen says is correct, they're due to make their attack tonight.

BLAND          Very well Sergeant, that's sound thinking. Take your men and go to Sheffield directly. We'll stop this nasty little plot, you can be sure of that.



And Mr. Allen, thank you for your time and trouble. If what you say is correct, never fear, I shall see to it that you will be very well rewarded.

ALLEN           *(Bowing)* I am your humble servant, Sir.

*STEWART and Mr. BLAND leave the room, conferring. Allen is left alone. He comes forward to the front of the stage and addresses the audience.*

ALLEN           But after this, not humble for long!  
                  There's no profit in rebelling—  
                  Much better to exist by selling!  
                  Broken pledges make good reward—  
                  What's in a Charter but a chance of fraud!  
                  Poor Sam Holberry, waiting for his rising,  
                  Later on tonight he'll get quite a surprising!

*BLACKOUT*

SCENE 9: The Holberrys' house in Eyre Lane, Sheffield: Midnight, January 11th, 1840

*SAM and MARY wait apprehensively.*

MARY            It's a cold night Sam.

SAM             Wait until the fires start later—they will warm up the air all over Sheffield. The diversion at the barracks will begin any time now.

MARY            How do you feel?

SAM             I'm nervous Mary. A lot depends on tonight. If we fail, it will be an important chance lost, and there will be many who will lose faith in us and the Charter.

MARY            Sam, don't even talk of failure. For the sake of the people, yes, but for our own sake and the life of our child. She will need to live and love in a better world Sam, a world fit for all our children.

So let's make sure we succeed. Our comrades' courage is up, and I know that the Sheffield people will be behind us. They are aching for a change, Sam.

SAM             You're right Mary, you always are. But it's very hard to wait—you know I was always bad at waiting, Mary.

*There is a sudden banging and crashing outside the door, accompanied by loud shouting and hammering on the door. SAM goes into his pocket and brings out a dagger. Four soldiers and a superintendent of police barge in, all led by Sergeant STEWART.*

STEWART        *(Shouting at SAM and pointing his gun at him)* Samuel Holberry and Mary Holberry, you are both under arrest for hatching a conspiracy against Her Majesty Queen Victoria's Government. Now, put down the dagger Holberry, your game is up, you're discovered! Your precious comrade, Mr. Allen has informed us against you!

MARY            Allen! We've been betrayed Sam.

SAM He'll get his reward, deep in his soul. (*He drops his dagger.*)

STEWART Don't you recognise me Holberry? Don't you remember that day in Ireland?

SAM (*Staring at STEWART*) Is that Jack STEWART? Jack from the regiment?

STEWART It's me Holberry, it's me all right—the very same, except I've had a promotion—and I'm afraid you're for damnation.

SAM Damn you and your lords Jack, maybe... (*the soldiers seize him*) But you're too late to stop the march of the people.

STEWART We shall see Holberry, we shall see. You never were a very good soldier, were you? Someone like you, a coward in battle, could never lead an attack on the British Army, you must know that. We'd eat you up, just like we ate up the Irish. Do you remember the Ribbonmen Holberry? Well, now we're going to do the same to you.

SAM Ah Jack, but do you also remember the words of the young Irishwoman—'We run towards you, British soldiers!'—I could never say it as well as she did.

STEWART Take him away men—and her too—we'll see what their little brat has to scream about when he's born inside a prison.

*SAM and MARY are bundled out by the soldiers.*

SAM (*His voice muffled*) Long live the Charter! Long live the common people!

*BLACKOUT*

SCENE 10:

*MARY comes to the front of the stage.*

MARY           A terrible time followed us.  
Our revolt was broken in its stem,  
Our comrades taken, transported and jailed.  
Our little son, the fruit of love  
Died like our moment,  
Barely having breathed the dawn.  
For Sam the judge had little mercy—  
Though mercy we were not expecting:  
Four years in prison,  
The treadmill and a solitary cell,  
For Sam, the landscape of a living hell.

SAM           *(Writing from prison, with the WARDER closely watching)*  
My Dear Mary, you say you would like to visit me: but how  
can we see each other through these odious bars? I am  
afraid that my sickness may be the consumption—if so, and  
should I die, I leave my message of struggle and freedom in  
your dear hands, to always warm and keep alive—for all the  
Englishmen and Englishwomen, those of all races and from  
all climes. Your loving husband, Sam.

*SAM puts down his completed letter and the WARDER turns to him.*

WARDER       Well Holberry, I've listened to you, and to tell you the truth,  
I never fell asleep—not once. But now tell me the truth—  
without no political blarney about the Charter and all that  
—was it worth it? I mean look at you now.

SAM           *(Beginning to cough)* A grasp at freedom is worth a lifetime,  
my brother. As history turns, as its wheel goes round, never  
stopping, then judge me and my comrades. For others deep  
into time will pick up our words and deeds and carry them  
to success. Judge us then.

WARDER       You'll never learn, will you Holberry?

SAM           *(His voice fading)* I've never stopped, my friend, never  
stopped learning...

*FADING TO BLACKOUT*

SCENE 11: The Roadside in Sharrow Vale, Sheffield, June 27th 1842

*An OLD MAN and a young GIRL are standing by the roadside as a funeral procession passes. 'The Charter Forwarding' is playing as a funeral march.*

OLD MAN        Look Sylvie, it's the funeral passing of Samuel Holberry.

GIRL             Who was he, Grandad?

OLD MAN        He was a Chartist, a brave, brave man.

GIRL             Is that why there are so many watching him pass by? And there must be thousands marching in the street.

OLD MAN        Yes my girl, there are thousands and thousands, all the way from Attercliffe to Ecclesall.

GIRL             And that lady in the front, is that his wife?



OLD MAN        That's Mary Holberry, Sylvie, a woman of love and steel.  
She carries on his fight and everything that they worked for  
together.

GIRL             But Granddad, who were the Chartists?

OLD MAN        They were men and women who believed in justice for  
ordinary people like you and me, Sylvie—that we should  
run our lives our way, learning from each other to find  
freedom together.

I think that's what Sam Holberry died for, my girl, listen to  
what they are saying over his grave...

*Lights focus, then gradually fades, on the faces of the OLD MAN  
and the GIRL, as voices of the Chartist leader, GEORGE JULIAN HARNEY,  
delivering the funeral oration, sounds through the theatre.*

VOICE            Our task is not to weep... Our task is to act, to labour with  
heart and soul for the destruction of the terrible system  
under which Holberry has perished.

Tyrants have in all ages and in all countries striven by  
persecution to crush liberty. We bid them defiance! Come  
weal, come woe, we swear... To put forth the giant struggle  
which union will call into being.

If you do this and act upon your vow, our children will  
rejoice that Holberry died not in vain, but that from his  
ashes arose, phoenix-like, his dauntless spirit...

*The sound of 'The Charter Forwarding' is heard, and gradually grows  
in volume until it fills the theatre.*

The Charter forwarding  
The people moving on,  
All of England will soon be with us.  
The Charter forwarding  
The people moving on,  
Soon Queen Victoria, you'll be gone!

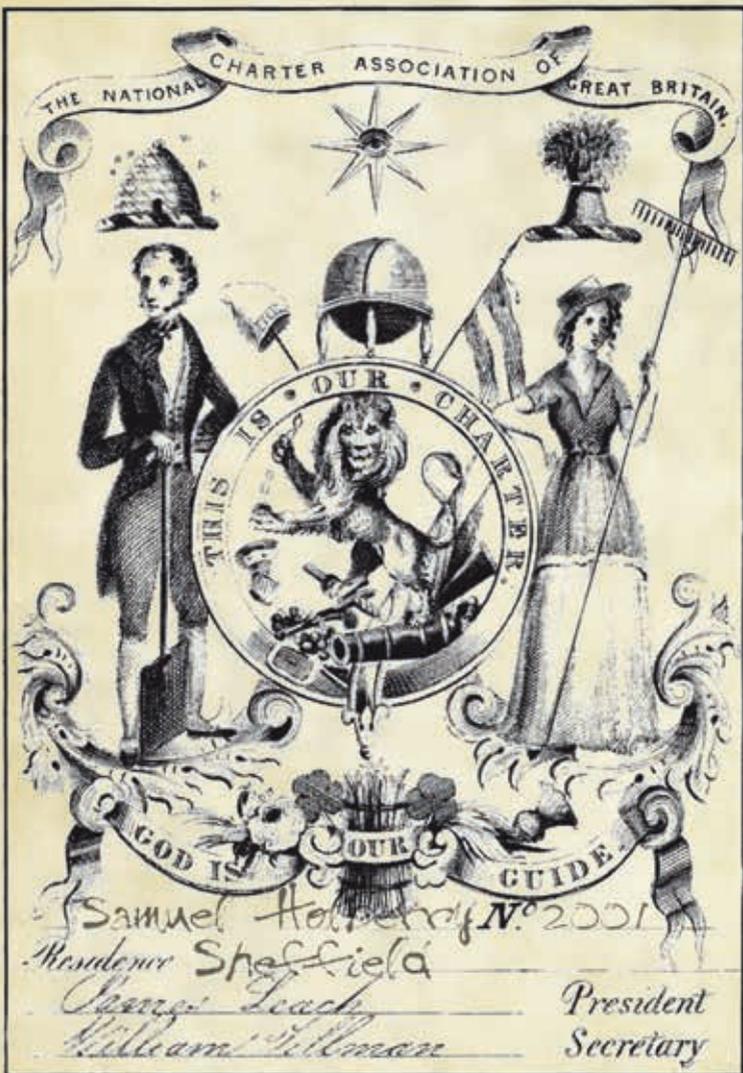
*Below the softening sound of 'The Charter Forwarding', the OLD MAN and THE GIRL continue their conversation.*

GIRL                      Will I be like the Holberrys, Grandad, like Sam and Mary?

OLD MAN                That will be for you to choose, Sylvie, that will be whatever you think. But I've got a picture in my head and it won't go away. I see it all the time. All of our children stepping the way of the Holberrys, whether they're from here in Sheffield, or Derby, or London or Newport in Wales, in Newcastle, Glasgow or Ireland, in Africa, India, China or the Americas, all like a great shrub, a great bush, a ripening forest of Holberrys all over the world—beautiful, young and full of the fruit of the future, the juice of freedom and love between all of us, the working people of the world.

GIRL                      I'll be a Holberry, Grandad. All my life, I'll be a Holberry.

*END*



'The People's Charter' consisted of 6 points:

1. A VOTE for every man twenty-one years of age, of sound mind, and not undergoing punishment for crime.
2. A SECRET BALLOT, to protect the elector in the exercise of his vote.
3. NO PROPERTY QUALIFICATION for Members of Parliament—thus enabling the constituencies to return the man of their choice, be he rich or poor.
4. PAYMENT OF MEMBERS, thus enabling an honest tradesman, working man, or other person, to serve a constituency, when taken from his business to attend to the interests of the Country.
5. EQUAL CONSTITUENCIES, securing the same amount of representation for the same number of electors, instead of allowing small constituencies to swamp the votes of large ones.
6. ANNUAL PARLIAMENTS, thus presenting the most effectual check to bribery and intimidation, since though a constituency might be bought once in seven years (even with the ballot), no purse could buy a constituency (under a system of universal suffrage) in each ensuing twelve-month; and since members, when elected for a year only, would not be able to defy and betray their constituents.

**Inscription on the gravestone of the Sheffield Chartist leader,  
Samuel Holberry 1814—1842**

It was reported that up to 50,000 people lined the route of his funeral procession on 27th June 1842 as it travelled through Sheffield to the cemetery at Sharrow.

see: <https://gencem.org/stories/buried-stories-samuel-holberry/>



**SACRED**  
to the Memory of  
**SAMUEL HOLBERRY,**

WHO AT THE EARLY AGE OF 27 DIED  
IN YORK CASTLE, AFTER SUFFERING  
AN IMPRISONMENT OF 2 YEARS AND 3  
MONTHS, JUNE 21st, 1842.

FOR ADVOCATING WHAT TO HIM APPEARED,  
TO BE THE TRUE INTEREST OF THE PEOPLE OF  
ENGLAND.

VANISH'D IS THE FEVERISH DREAM OF LIFE:-  
THE RICH AND POOR FIND NO DISTINCTION HERE,  
THE GREAT AND LOWLY END THEIR CARE AND STRIFE,  
THE WELL BELOVED MAY HAVE AFFECTIONS TEAR.  
BUT AT THE LAST, TH' OPPRESSOR AND THE SLAVE  
SHALL EQUAL STAND BEFORE THE BAR OF GOD;  
OF HIM, WHO LIFE, AND HOPE, AND FREEDOM GAVE,  
TO ALL THAT THRO' THIS VALE OF TEARS HAVE TROD.  
LET NONE THEN MURMUR 'GAINST THE WISE DECREE,  
THAT OPEN'D THE DOOR, AND SET THE CAPTIVE FREE.

ALSO OF SAMUEL JOHN, HIS SON WHO DIED IN HIS INFANCY.  
THIS TABLET WAS ERECTED BY HIS BEREFT WIDOW.

## About the authors

### Chris Searle

Chris was born in Romford in 1944, has taught in Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, East London, Mozambique, Grenada, Sheffield and Manchester. He has written or edited over fifty books, including *The Forsaken Lover* (which won the Martin Luther King Award in 1973), *Classrooms of Resistance*, *The World in a Classroom*, *We're Building the New School*, *Words Unchained: Language and Revolution in Grenada*, *Your Daily Dose: Racism and 'The Sun'*, *Pitch of Life* and *Forward Groove*. He writes a regular jazz column for the *Morning Star*. His most recent poetry collection is *Over Eagle Pond* published by Culture Matters, and two volumes of autobiography, *Isaac and I* and *The World is in Our Words*. He has been on the Editorial Advisory Committee of the international journal, *Race and Class*, since 1983.

### Ron McCormick

Ron's photographs of Spitalfields life, *Neighbours: Spitalfields to Whitechapel* were exhibited at Whitechapel Art Gallery and The Serpentine Gallery and he was a commissioned artist for the seminal exhibition *Inside Whitechapel* (Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1973). With a background in both Fine Art (Liverpool College of Art and the Royal Academy Schools) and documentary photography, he has been involved in social and community initiatives since the early 1970s. He has taught at the School of Documentary Photography in Newport, South Wales and Southampton Solent University. His photographs are in the collections of Bibliotheque Nationale, The National Library of Wales, Curtin University, Perth, Australia and the Arts Council of Great Britain.

**Holberrys** is a play about two Sheffield Chartists, Samuel and Mary Holberry, who helped organise the betrayed ‘physical force’ insurrection in the city in January 1840.

Samuel, a distillery worker, former agricultural worker and ex-soldier who had served in Ireland in the suppression of the Ribbonmen rebellion in 1833, and his wife Mary, were at the centre of militant campaigning and planning the rebellion.

Their plans were divulged, with Samuel sentenced to four years imprisonment in prisons in Northallerton and York, where he died of consumption in 1842 at the age of 27. A hero of his time to working people, over 50,000 people attended his funeral procession in Sheffield.

The Holberrys’ story is illustrated using moving photographs taken by photographer Ron McCormick during a school children’s re-enactment of the Chartist rising in Newport, South Wales in November 1839.

**Holberrys** dramatises the lives of Samuel and Mary and their years in Sheffield, ever a city of resistance and struggle. Its author, Chris Searle, is a lifelong teacher. It is a play for both the stage and the classroom, telling of an important episode in British history rarely remembered.

