

## Peter Murray McDouall – Chartist Leader in the 1830's – 40's



### Foreword

Dr. P.M. McDouall was especially prominent in the Chartist Movement during the early Victorian era. A comment in our archives, and the fact that he was a McDouall from Galloway, obviously drew our attention, begging the question as to his ancestry and to which branch of the clan he was descended from. Further, while his life and career as an activist for the working class is well documented, his death in Australia was something of a mystery, now largely resolved through diligent research by Bruce McDowall of Melbourne, Australia. This paper delves into his life and career, and in the conclusion, analyses what little is known of his ancestry, and provides evidence as to his death. Paradoxically, his activism would have put him at odds with the McDoualls of Freugh who, a century earlier, represented exactly the wealthy, landowning politicians whom McDouall so despised. On the other hand, he was clearly a national hero to many, as revealed in the Northern Star newspaper reports of September 1840 in the appendix. Sources include a number of articles on the Internet, particularly one by Ray Challinor on *“Physical Force Chartism”*, as well as Nigel Jepson’s book *“Ramsbottom’s Revolutionary Doctor”*.

From our archives, Ellen McDouall (1 Jan 1825 – 10 Sep 1861) at New Freugh, NSW wrote a letter dated 30 Oct 1848 to her sister Kate Shortland née Fitzgerald (b.1824): ‘If England is to follow the example of the continent, I shall wish you safely out of it, but, except by the Chartists, I do not approve of riots and we think that England has too many sensible men in her to fear commotions.’ Ellen appears to support the work of the Chartists, perhaps because of the kinship with Dr. McDouall, who by 1848 was the best known of their leaders.

### Summary

Born ca. 1814 in Newton Stewart, the son of Andrew McDouall, Peter Murray McDouall married Mary Anne in Glasgow in 1840. He served an apprenticeship with a surgeon in his home town, studied at Glasgow and Edinburgh, and in the summer of 1835 was admitted to the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh.

McDouall was a prosperous surgeon who became an activist after seeing the plight of factory workers in the town where he practiced in northern England. He was known for his passionate temperament and became the foremost advocate of attaining government reform through physical force. He was imprisoned for 12 months for sedition in 1839 but this only served to enhance his reputation.

The core objective of the Chartists was political reform, outlined in the People's Charter, to give the working class a voice in Parliament. It was said that “no man in the Chartist movement was better known than Dr McDouall”. Imprisoned twice, and dying at a relatively young age, it is not too much to say that McDouall gave his life for Chartism. He was one of the half-dozen outstanding leaders of Chartism which can be regarded as its first organised expression of workers, and from its outset was riven by a division between supporters of physical force and those who believed in moral force; in fact, the two camps – revolutionaries and reformists – continue in working-class politics right down to the present-day.

After release from a two-year prison term in 1850, his efforts to publish McDouall’s Manchester Journal and to establish a medical practice in Ashton both foundered. In the summer of 1853, McDouall emigrated to Australia but he died shortly after his arrival in about May 1854, one version of his demise speculating that his ship had capsized, but we now know otherwise.

## The People's Charter 1838

The Charter called for:

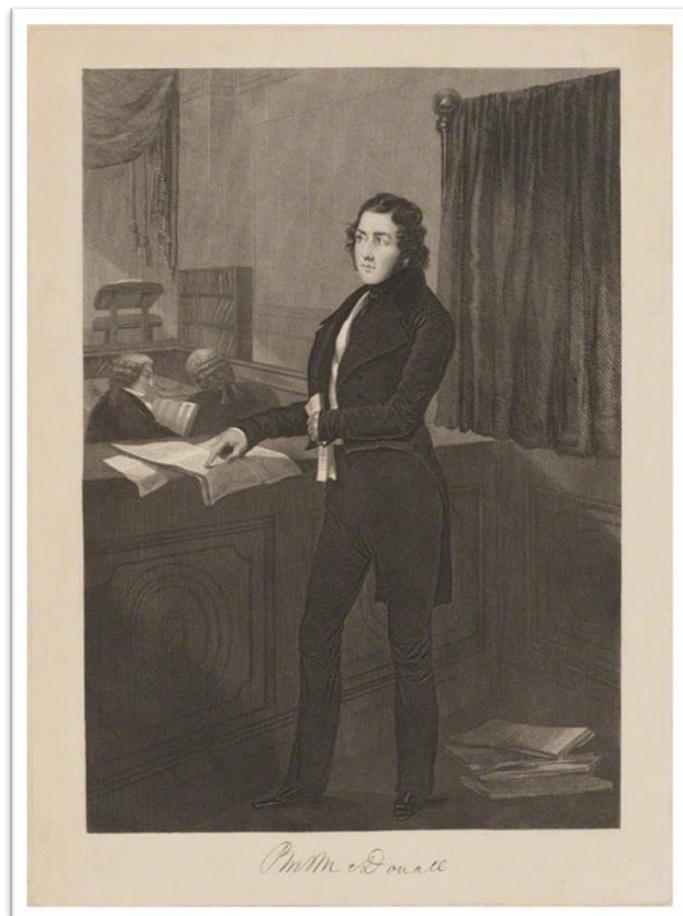
- **A VOTE** for every man twenty-one years of age and above, of sound mind, and not undergoing punishment for crime.
- **THE SECRET BALLOT** to protect the electors in the exercise of their vote.
- **NO PROPERTY QUALIFICATION** for members of Parliament – thus enabling the constituencies to return the person of their choice, whether rich or poor.
- **PAYMENT OF MEMBERS**, thus enabling an honest tradesman, working man, or other person, to serve a constituency.
- **EQUAL CONSTITUENCIES**, securing the same amount of representation for the same number of electors – instead of allowing rotten boroughs.
- **ANNUAL PARLIAMENTS**, thus presenting the most effectual check to bribery and intimidation.

When the Charter was written in 1838, 18% of the male population could vote, but only 10% prior to 1832. People who owned property of significant value were previously qualified to become MPs. By removing this requirement candidates would no longer consist of only the upper class. MPs were not paid for their work, therefore only people with extreme wealth could afford to be MPs, but since they would be earning wages, it opens the door for the less wealthy. At the time, voting was done in public in a 'show of hands' at the 'Hustings' and landlords and employers could see which way their tenants and employees were voting, and were therefore subject to threats or intimidation to vote for a specific candidate.

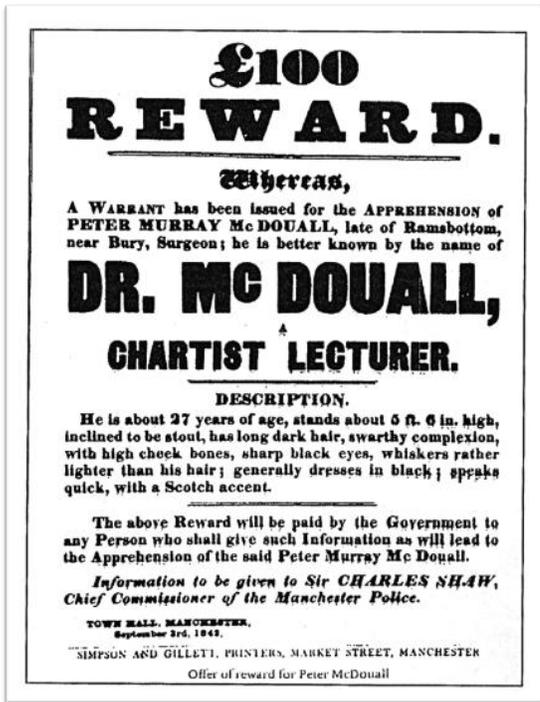
### Portraits of Peter Murray McDouall



Peter Murray McDouall – 1838 Portrait  
Delegate to the First Chartist Convention



Peter Murray McDouall – 1840 Engraving



Description of the Doctor on a McDouall wanted poster:

He is about 27 years of age, stands about 5 ft. 6 in. high, inclined to be stout, has long dark hair, swarthy complexion, with high cheek bones, sharp black eyes, whiskers rather lighter than his hair; generally dresses in black; speaks quick, with a Scotch accent.

With his small stature he was nicknamed *'The Little Doctor'*.

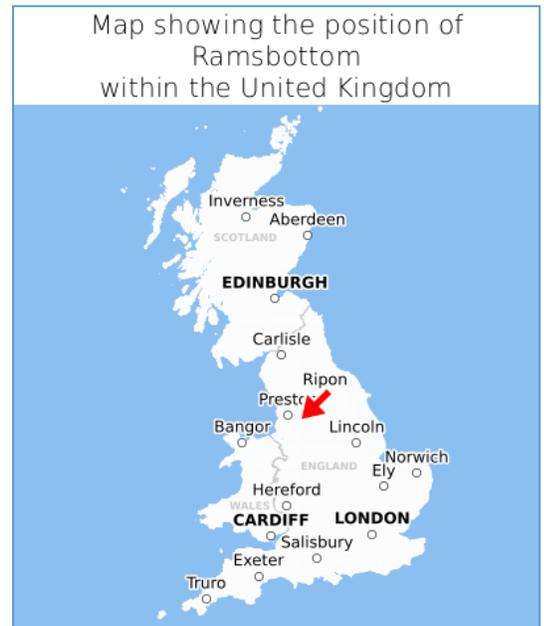
Reporters who wrote about him, described him as follows:

"Dr McDouall had a long cloak and general style of a hero of melodrama ... (he) was a man of taste and culture."

"McDouall was rather short, but possessed a straight and well-erect frame ... The Doctor was of an ardent fiery temperament, and though naturally possessing strong reflective powers, was impulsive to the last degree, and by no means deficient in the quality of courage."



This blue plaque is on the wall of Roger Greenlees, Jeweller, on the main road through Ramsbottom, Bury, Greater Manchester, England.



[The following chapter details McDouall's activities in Chartism. To go directly to the conclusion and information on his ancestry and death, jump to page 22]

## The Chartist Movement

Nothing in his early years presaged McDouall's later development. Born at Newton Stewart in Wigtownshire he qualified in medicine at Edinburgh University, became a prosperous surgeon and acquired property in the locality. But like John Taylor, another physical force Chartist leader who, by remarkable coincidence, was also a surgeon and came from the same part of Scotland, he was drawn into the political whirlpool. Both men, according to W.E. Adams, also had similar picturesque appearances: Dr McDouall "had a long cloak and general style of a hero of melodrama ... (he) was a man of taste and culture." According to R.G. Gammage "McDouall was rather short, but possessed a straight and well-erect frame ... The Doctor was of an ardent fiery temperament, and though naturally possessing strong reflective powers, was impulsive to the last degree, and by no means deficient in the quality of courage."

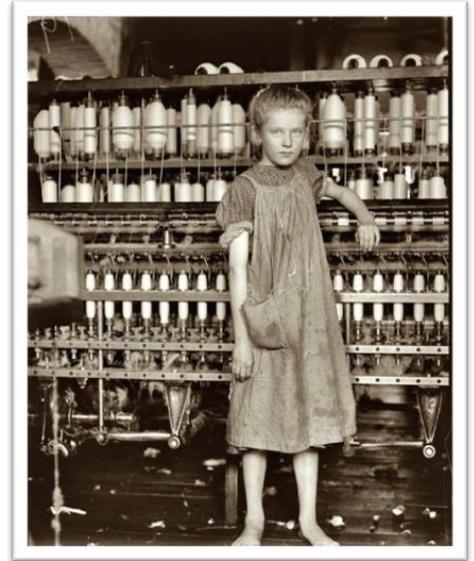
McDouall's introduction to Chartism came when he moved to Lancashire. He opened up his surgery in the small town of Ramsbottom, situated between Bury and Accrington. There he encountered some of the appalling conditions that were to shock Frederick Engels a few years later. Their first reactions were very similar – to investigate the situation thoroughly and then to announce their findings. In 1838 McDouall gave a paper to the British Association. It was based upon his own research in places like Preston. He described the millworkers receiving a pitiful weekly wage of 3s 6d or 4s and families of seven living in a single room. Generally speaking, mill workers toiled long hours for low pay, and in many cases were children as young as eight. In addition, their conditions were made worse by mill owners using an illegal system called 'trucking'; the exact mechanism varied, but often part or all of the workers pay consisted of tokens that could only be spent in shops run by the mill owners.

Clearly, he sympathised with the suffering masses. In order to do something tangible to help, he addressed public meetings to denounce the iniquities of the new Poor Law Amendment Act. He became a staunch advocate of the power of the ordinary worker. He explained, "The Trades are equal to the middle class in talent, far more powerful in means and much more united in action."

It became obvious, however, that this, by itself, was not enough; much more sweeping changes were necessary if society's ills were to be cured. When his colleague, Dr. Mathew Fletcher, proposed they should attend a Chartist meeting in Bury, McDouall readily agreed – and both of them joined the Movement that evening. The conversion did not change everything immediately: McDouall still retained the belief that enlightened people in exalted positions could do more good than the masses could by themselves. Much to W.J. Linton's chagrin, he wrote a poem to Queen Victoria, requesting Her Royal Highness to alleviate some of the hardships experienced by some of her less fortunate subjects.

Admittedly, he mentioned her part in contributing to this suffering:

"That jewelled crown upon thy youthful head  
Was chased and wrought by men who pine for bread.  
The flowery lace, the silk, the satin traces  
Were wove by hands all cramped by cold and pain.  
Consumptive death rests on that needle-point,  
And that small pin disturbs the infant's joints."



Child labour in the cotton mills  
working 10-hour days, 6 days a week



Even so, he still thought she had it within her power to put an end to this distress, and therefore considered it worthwhile to make such an appeal to the Queen.

McDouall's outlook underwent a drastic alteration once he became closely associated with Ashton-under-Lyne in the spring of 1839. A town outside Manchester, Ashton had some of the biggest factories, with the most modern machinery, anywhere in the country. Rapid economic expansion led to an equally rapid influx of labour. These were mainly young men, sometimes Irish, first-generation factory fodder, who submitted resentfully to the harsh industrial discipline.

Ashton-under-Lyne produced immense wealth and immense poverty. Its greatest production, however, appears to have been the wrath of its workers. In their anger, they looked around for a way of retaliating: Chartism became the means and McDouall their leader. Together they articulated workers' grievances to an unprecedented extent, as well as forging in struggle a unity and cohesion that had never before existed.

This, for McDouall, was the real significance of the Movement. "The agitation for the Charter has afforded one of the greatest examples in modern history of the real might of the labourers. In the conflict millions have appeared on the stage and the mind of the masses has burst from its shell and begun to flourish and expand." The Chartist Movement did not merely foster and encourage expression by the workers as a class, it also nurtured the talents of countless individuals, making them capable of attainments they otherwise would not even have dreamt of. McDouall himself exemplified this phenomenon: hidden powers blossomed under the exigencies of battle. He learnt the skills of a journalist, writing numerous articles in a clear and forceful manner. He became an editor of the Chartist and Republican Journal, one of the best publications of the Movement. He acquired the astuteness and tricks of a politician, useful in Chartism's internal faction fights, as well as dealing with devious class enemies. Above all, McDouall developed as a first-class orator – the little man, stuttering and nervous, punctuating his speeches with embarrassing pauses, developed into one of the most powerful and pungent spokesmen the Movement possessed. Popular throughout the country at public meetings, he emerged as one of Chartism's great leaders. The primary distinction between the Chartists and the Trades Unionists is that the Chartists were a political movement aimed at achieving parliamentary reform and universal male suffrage, while trade unions were industrial organizations focused on improving workers' immediate economic conditions, such as wages and working hours.

The Ashton-under-Lyne area intended to have the Rev. J.R. Stephens as their delegate to the Chartist Convention. On 27 December 1838, however, the police arrested Stephens for an inflammatory speech he had made at an illegal meeting the previous month. Although released on bail, he declined to serve as a delegate, and proposed McDouall should take his place at the Convention. From the standpoint of Ashton Chartists, the change seemed eminently reasonable. Both men appeared to have similar policies, advocating workers should arm and be prepared to fight for their rights.

Many parts of the country were in turmoil by 4 February 1839, when the Chartist Convention began its deliberation in London. Demonstrations, marches, arming and drilling, all taking place on an unprecedented scale, constituted a threat to the established order. McDouall did not want to lose the initiative, the momentum must be maintained, and, to do this, the Convention had to make a call to people throughout Britain for an immediate insurrection. Unless such a lead was given, he threatened to withdraw from the Convention. But McDouall was misjudging the character of the Chartist Convention. Undoubtedly, it was an historic gathering. It can be seen as an important landmark in the making of the working class, its first entry as a significant force into the arena of national politics. However, seeing that it was a class still in its infancy, not surprisingly the Convention lacked cohesion and coherence. A wide variety of diverse political ideologies were held by the 53 delegates. The predominant mood was one of caution. To most of the representatives, it remained uncertain how the government would react. Confronted by a campaign of unparalleled magnitude, what would the authorities do? Would they concede to the workers democratic rights? Most delegates thought that at least before contemplating the leap into revolution favoured by McDouall, a thorough investigation should be made to see whether the issue could be resolved peacefully. This meant waiting until all the signatures to the petition had been collected and Parliament given time to reach a decision. As a consequence, the Convention's proceedings dragged on with a dwindling attendance and enthusiasm. Only in July did the House of Commons consider the Charter, rejecting it by 235 votes to 46; by then, when the delegates did turn to a serious

consideration of 'ulterior measures', the Convention had lost much of its credibility. It found itself unable to mount a serious challenge.

The authorities, on the other hand, used the delay to strengthen their defences. Had the uprising occurred on 6 May, as originally planned, it would have created great difficulties. An historian who has examined the government's ability to cope with an insurrection at that time reached the conclusion that the "defences were in a perilous state of disorganisation – the troops scattered in small detachments, the reinforcements from Ireland not yet arrived; the magistrates inert either from fear or indifference, and the propertied inhabitants afraid to come forward as special constables to defend themselves." But, thanks to the Chartists' indecision, the authorities secured overwhelming superiority. General Napier reinforced his forces, concentrating his forces at four or five strategic points, and expressed confidence he would be able to deal with any eventuality. At the same time, the police force was increased in size, as well as being augmented by the recruitment of special constables, mainly from the middle classes.

By August, the authorities felt the situation was firmly under control. Sufficiently strong, they resolved to go over to the offensive.

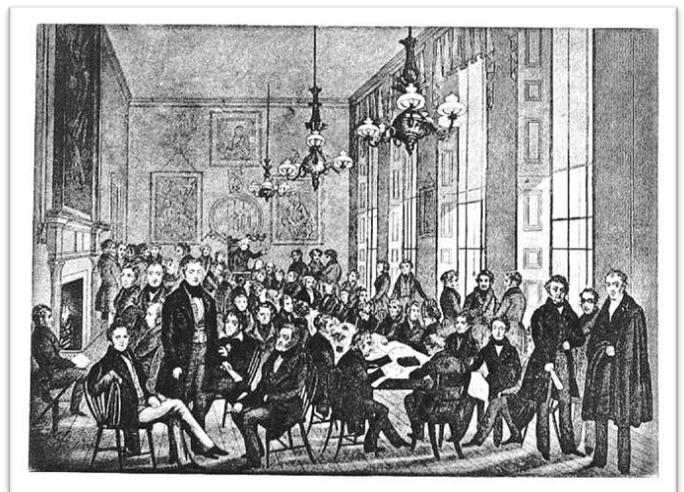
Having bided their time, they made a large number of arrests, beheading the Movement. The Chartist Convention had met intermittently between February and September 1839, at four different venues in London and Birmingham. Well before it reached the end of its protracted proceedings, the Convention had become discredited, a body without a strategy or a function.

Dr. McDouall could have claimed to have foreseen the debacle; equally he could have claimed to have done all that lay in his power to avoid it happening. After his call for an immediate insurrection had been defeated in February, he did not carry out his threat to leave the Convention. Instead, he remained as a delegate, putting forward his views. He belonged to an influential group there – it included Peter Bussey, Julian Harney and Dr. John Taylor – who were advocates of physical force. Other delegates may not entirely have agreed with his opinions, nevertheless they respected him as an individual. Hence, they chose him as one of the leaders who, on 25 May 1839, presented the monster petition to Parliament. Later, he vividly described the experience:

"Previous to the appointed day, roll after roll arrived and were added to the parent sheet. There seemed to prevail a universal enthusiasm throughout the nation, and when the numbers were proclaimed, 1,300,000 signatures, on the morning of the 25th, the cheers resounded, through the Old Bailey, and rolled away in its granite recesses. Eighteen



Located in Hyde, Greater Manchester, England



First Chartist Convention 1839

stone-masons, principally from the New Houses of Lords and Commons, volunteered to carry the mass down, and preparatory to the march a meeting was held in an adjoining tavern. The men were in high spirits, and on eight names being called out they filed out like soldiers, and capital ones they would have made. Our little room, 55, Old Bailey, was crowded to suffocation, and the street blocked up. With some difficulty, the eight masons, attired in clean white fustian jackets, got admission, and the place being cleared of strangers, a large frame was brought in, composed of two long beams of wood, supporting a cup like socket the size of the immense roll. It was like the end of a tun sawed off, into which the equally tun-like petition was placed, then completing the resemblance. At quarter past three we got under way, the members of the Convention marched three abreast in front, and a vast procession in the rear ...

“The spectacle attracted great attention, from the ragged street sweeper to the duchess with the golden eye glass. The city police behaved very favourably, but the metropolitan blues were very indifferent. The omnibus drivers were very rough and violent. We marched down, slow marched, through Fleet Street, the Strand, past Charing Cross, the Horse Guards, and to Parliament House. The windows of the public offices were particularly crowded, and great curiosity seemed to prevail. The door of the House was finally reached, and around it there was an immense crowd awaiting. Then but not until then, did the cheering commence. It began in front and rolled back along the line, and swelled louder and louder, until the thunder reached the inner House. Horses pranced and galloped off, carriages clanked together in confusion, and the astonished police ran together to defend the entrance to the House ...

“A message arrived for the petition to be carried into the lobby, and consequently the fustian jackets moved up the matted stairs, and along the entrance, through a line of strangers and Members of Parliament. In the lobby the usual order was upset and a great crowd besieged the door of the House itself, the great petition seeming like the head of a battering ram against the green base doorway. Presently Mr Duncombe appeared, and the mass being lowered and turned on its side, it was rolled on to the floor of the House like a mighty snowball, bearing the good wishes of all around, and 1,300,000 people’s blessings.”

After delivering the petition, the Chartist leaders turned their minds to the question of how they could bring pressure to bear on Parliament. The Convention agreed on a number of ulterior measures. These included withdrawing savings from the banks, boycotting hostile newspapers and exclusive dealing – that is, the purchase of goods only from shopkeepers who supported The Charter. Though backing these measures, McDouall regarded them as woefully inadequate. They would have to challenge authority much more directly if they were to succeed; July, he declared, was “a celebrated month for revolutions”. Along with Dr Taylor, he urged the Movement to call a general strike. This idea gained considerable support. One William Benbow had for many years been an advocate of using the general strike as a weapon to redress workers’ wrongs. He had even written a pamphlet *The Grand National Holiday*, published in 1832, to explain the plan. Many Chartists were convinced by him, and the Convention agreed to have “the sacred month”, when all work throughout the land would cease.

McDouall strived to make “the sacred month” more effective. He put three proposals to the organising committee. First, that it should liaise with trade unions, leaving the implementation to them. Second, that it should encourage unemployed labourers to hold meetings on the first day of the strike for requesting relief from all rates and greater financial assistance from the wealthy. And third, that it should urge all people throughout the United Kingdom to demonstrate on the first day to protest against the government and to show their adherence to The Charter. From the outset, preparations for “the sacred month” encountered problems. The eight-man committee appointed to liaise with trade unions discovered organised labour was reluctant to cooperate. Most unions had few members and little money. Not able to defend the existing unsatisfactory levels of wages, they were reluctant to squander funds, carefully garnered for industrial purposes, on some hastily thought-out political scheme. With unorganised labour – the vast majority – the greater poverty and unemployment made the committee’s task still more daunting. They did not possess the resources to remain on strike for any period.

Benbow’s answer to their predicament was alarmingly simple: “the cattle upon a thousand hills” should be regarded as their strike fund. But to other delegates, however, this simply served to heighten misgivings about the whole project. If “the sacred month” was to be accompanied by a nationwide orgy of looting and stealing, the authorities could not be expected to stand idly by. Troops would shoot demonstrators, and the authorities would be provided with a pretext for employing still more repressive measures. In the *Northern Star*, Feargus O’Connor placed his considerable influence on the side of those wanting to abort “the sacred month”; he said it would only lead to catastrophe and defeat.

But what turned out to be more decisive were the unfavourable reports from Chartists throughout Britain. With the exception of the North East, in almost all districts the response was expected to be poor. Even Manchester and Hyde – McDouall's stomping ground – came out against the strike call. As a result of the overall situation, the Chartist Convention resolved to rescind its previous decision: "the sacred month" was called off on July 22.

As one of the foremost advocates of "the sacred month", McDouall received much of the blame for the fiasco. Yet, in a sense, delegates' condemnation of him had little consequence; the Chartist Convention itself had become discredited. Over the months of its protracted proceedings, strength had drained away from the Convention. The vote to call off "the sacred month" on July 22 had been carried by 12 votes to six, with seven abstentions. In other words, less than half of its 53 delegates had taken part in this important decision.

Despite its long deliberations, the Convention had little or nothing to show for its efforts. Its biggest demonstration had been its own failure: its failure to persuade Parliament to grant The Charter peacefully; its failure to organise a national uprising; and, finally, its failure to arrange a general strike. Among Chartists in most parts of Britain, a sense of disillusionment prevailed not only with the Convention but also existing organisational arrangements. Well before he left the Convention on July 25, McDouall had discerned this mood and had argued for new constitutional arrangements – greater centralisation, more discipline, closer ties with the trade unions. In his opinion, only if this happened could Chartism develop the necessary cohesion to become effective.

Meanwhile, McDouall had to prepare for an impending court case. For several months, the authorities had been determined to get him. As a pretext, they used a meeting that had taken place on April 22nd, when he had spoken to 3,000 people, half of whom belonged to the Hyde Female Radical Association. He faced charges of sedition and illegal assembly, and McDouall was determined to make a fight of it. Courageously, he proclaimed his Chartist principles in court. The crux of the prosecution's case was that McDouall's "object was to overthrow laws by force, and to incite the people to bloody revolution". It alleged that, along with several accomplices, he had purchased muskets and bayonets from George Thompson, a Birmingham gunsmith, besides placing orders for more. At the Hyde meeting on April 22nd, it was claimed he had told his audience that 50 determined people could capture the country: all that was necessary was to seize the arms at the Tower of London and distribute the weapons to 200,000 Londoners.

In reply, McDouall denied the Hyde meeting had been illegal. No violence had been used or contemplated: "the people merely met together for the purpose of considering the expediency of adopting the People's Charter." He did not deny, however, advocating the possession of weapons. Ever since Anglo-Saxon times, he said, people had a right to carry arms for their own defence; it was a bulwark against tyranny, curbing the repressive powers of the state.

In retrospect, it is difficult to disentangle the conflicting accounts. Definitely, McDouall was exceedingly indiscreet if he spoke at a crowded public meeting about seizing the Tower of London. But even if the authorities did concoct the story, there is nevertheless independent evidence he toyed with using this kind of tactic. Alexander Somerville, author of *The Autobiography of a Working Man*, recalls having a conversation with McDouall when he spoke about plans to capture Woolwich arsenal and distribute the arms among his fellow Chartists. According to Somerville, a secret committee of war existed in 1839, with McDouall as commander in chief. So fearful was Somerville of the prospect of a bloodbath occurring, he wrote an article entitled *Dissuasive Warnings*. In this, he described from personal experience the horrors of war and counselled the disgruntled to be cautious. Some contemporary observers said his *Dissuasive Warnings*, which was widely circulated, played a big part in averting an uprising.

Clearly, it would have been hard for McDouall to claim that he did not advocate the possession of weapons. Four Chartists from Ashton-Stockport area had been caught with a large quantity of firearms in their possession. They also appeared before the same Chester Assizes, and were sentenced to 18 months each. Where McDouall made a much stronger case was in his rebuttal of the prosecution's slur that his "great atrocity" had been to stir up discontent for self-aggrandizement and monetary gain. His answer was to point to the pitiful conditions that prevailed. He cited the case of Thomas Ashton, of Hyde, who had to keep a family of nine on 11 shillings and seven pence, and others who were so overcrowded that they slept seven to a bed. "If people were comfortable, there would be no agitation," he argued, "but if real misery and distress exist, then agitation was the mere effect and their suffering the cause of the agitation." Then he reaffirmed his belief that the wrongs which people had to endure could only be ended once they had a say in the government of the country.

Later, after the trial, Thomas Dunning witnessed a curious spectacle:

“I called at the Bull’s Head Tavern, Northgate Street, an old inn frequented by many persons connected with the Cathedral, and among the assembled company I found a party of special constables, who had just received their wages for defending the city against the Chartists, who didn’t come to take the city and rescue the prisoners. The specials were ordering jugs of ale and drinking the health of Doctor McDouall, whose speech in defence had converted them to Chartism.”

But McDouall himself never had any illusion that his eloquence would affect the course of the trial. He knew the authorities were determined to get him. The judge sentenced him to a year’s imprisonment. He was also bound over to keep the peace for five years, himself for £500 and two sureties of £100 each. His one consolation must have been, as he entered prison, that his passionate and lucid defence of Chartism in the courtroom had made him one of the Movement’s most prominent leaders.

His 12 months in prison did not pass uneventfully. Like fellow Chartist James Williams, he proved romance can flourish in the most unlikely places – they both acquired wives first met during their incarceration. In the case of the North Eastern leader, she was a wealthy young lady who, as part of her charitable work, acted as a prison visitor. With her financial assistance, Williams opened a printing business, and, later, the *Sunderland Herald*. McDouall’s spouse, on the other hand, had less to offer, at least in monetary terms. She was the daughter of one of the warders at Chester Castle. When he was released, McDouall took Anne to Glasgow, and married her according to Scottish law.

Though he remained convinced of ultimate victory, he realised the need to avoid riots and premature uprisings, fights with the authorities culminating in demoralisation and defeat. For this reason, he was highly critical of the Newport uprising that occurred in November 1839. In a letter from prison, he acknowledged its leader – John Frost – as a personal friend, but argues it had been an “ill-managed, foolish and quixotic adventure”. Such setbacks interfered with the Movement slowly garnering its strength, creating the powerful organisation which would be required when, as he was quite certain, the final crisis erupted. “The financial disarrangement, the foreign difficulties, the domestic insurrection, will all merge in the end into a grand revolutionary outbreak. No power on earth can prevent it.”

But, within a few moments of leaving prison, McDouall discovered for himself how difficult it could be, in a changed political atmosphere, to implement his stricture to avoid riots. His supporters in Chester, still enthusiastic about his speech from the dock, wished to celebrate his release and hear his sparkling oratory again. The young doctor had hardly begun his speech when the magistrates declared it an illegal assembly and ordered the police to break up the meeting. McDouall, however, had many fervent followers among the soldiers stationed in Chester barracks. “Although we are soldiers, we have the feelings of working men”, they told him. “We will not let the bloody police disperse your meeting.”

McDouall, fearing a conflict might escalate into a serious confrontation and provide the authorities with a pretext for his immediate re-arrest, decided to abandon the meeting. The inhabitants of Chester appreciated his reasons for prudence; it only served to heighten their hostility towards the magistracy, the suppressors of free speech. Shopkeepers, and, remarkably, even some of the police, disgusted by the role they had been called upon to perform, declared their support for Chartism. Referring to the incident later, McDouall said that the Secretary of State could no longer rely on the undivided loyalty of either the police or the army; he boasted about having spies in both organisations.

Leaving Chester in August 1840, McDouall began a tour of the country. His first stop was the Queen’s Theatre, Liverpool, where “one of the largest meetings which had ever taken place in the town” was held. But this, and the numerous other meetings, were puny in comparison to the massive demonstration which awaited him when he triumphantly returned to his home city of Manchester on August 15. For weeks the town had been plastered with placards and posters, announcing his return. On the great day, a mammoth procession set off from Manchester’s Stevenson Square to march two miles to meet his train when it arrived at Cross Lane station, Salford. The marchers included an impressive number of trade unionists, radicals and female associations. At the front, immediately after two marshals on horseback, came a portrait of Dr. McDouall, surmounted by the inscription “The Tyrant’s Foe”. Among the other banners such slogans could be read as “The Prosperity of the Working Classes is the Foundation of the National Greatness”, “Labour, the Source of all Wealth”, “Massacre of Peterloo: Murder demands Justice”, and “Tremble! Tyrants, Tremble!”.

Eventually, some of the demonstrators managed to squeeze into the Carpenters' Hall. There, after hearing a speech of welcome, McDouall revealed imprisonment had quenched none of his ardour for the cause. He made a long speech, frequently punctuated by cheers and laughter from the audience, as this typical extract shows:

"The first thing a thinking man thought about was his dinner – (laughter) – and if he could not get it, he complained until he was satisfied on that score. He then began to look out for clothing, and his other physical wants; and when these were satisfied, he looked to the cultivation of the minds of his children. When they had got all this, the people of this country would still complain; and why should they not? They would do right always to complain till they received the full wages due to their labour. (Cheers)

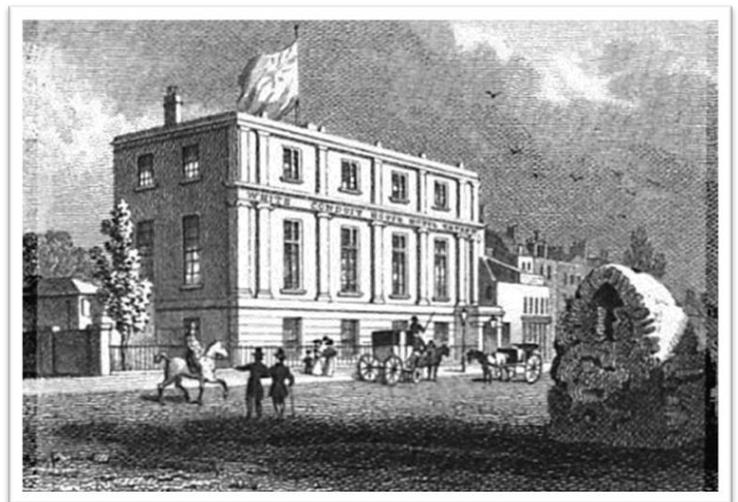
"Let them look at the situation of the agricultural and factory populations of this country. See the peasantry in rags and misery and distress – and then look at the broad and fertile valleys covered with waving corn and luxuriant pastures, and the palace of the tyrant rising among the trees. (Loud cheering) Then let them turn to the town, and point out one trade that was not over-stocked and over-peopled. (Cries of 'Not one') Let them look to the factory people, where death presented itself under a hundred different forms, and where thousands were sinking with disease and misery into a premature grave, the victims of tyranny and murder combined. (Cheers) ... But who was the cause of the poverty? The Government – the oppressors who robbed them. (Tremendous cheering)"

In the next two years he conducted tour after tour, usually addressing packed meetings, sometimes taking the Chartist message to parts of Britain where it had never been heard before. Poor attendances and wintry weather did not discourage him. Despite blizzards, in January 1842 he walked through Midlands towns and villages, cheerfully accepting the discomfiture involved. In the small Northamptonshire village of Pitchford, he found himself lecturing in a barn to a small gathering that included two policemen and two pigs:

"The pigs grunted, the police grumbled, and the people were satisfied. The police were sent for by an old lady, who either imagined that we were going to storm her house, or steal the pigs. The pigs remained unmolested to digest the first Chartist lecture ever addressed to the swinish multitude, and the police, like all watchful guardians on a frosty night, repaired to the public house, for the purpose of drinking the old lady's health, at her especial expense."

The following night McDouall addressed a second meeting at Pitchford, held in the town hall, full to overflowing. Successes followed in various other parts of the Midlands. Before long, his reputation was such that he was asked to stand for Northampton as the Chartist candidate in the 1841 general election. This was largely a propaganda exercise because most working people were disenfranchised; it nevertheless gave an opportunity to harangue the crowd, mainly of non-voters, at the hustings. The doctor secured 170 votes whereas the two winning Whig candidates gained 981 and 979 votes respectively.

In Scotland, McDouall held some extremely well-attended meetings. The 1839 debacle primarily had affected England and Wales, where in the aftermath, there had been a dip in the level of activity; in Scotland, by contrast, the Movement had been weak and uninvolved in the events of 1839. In the post-1839 period, Scottish Chartism received a great accretion of strength, with McDouall playing a leading part in building the Movement. The highlight of the tour came in Glasgow. An estimated 200,000 people assembled to hear speeches from White, Collins and McDouall. A huge procession marched on to Glasgow Green, with 30 bands and 100 banners. Workers walked in their trade groups – masons, smiths, shoemakers, cabinetmakers, dyers, dressers, boilermakers and so on. Female chartists had their own contingent on the march. When they all arrived on the Green, a representative of the women read out addresses to the three leaders, presenting each of them with a commemorative medal. But for Glaswegians themselves the demonstration also had a commemorative significance: as the Scots Times claimed "the old radical spirit" had been



The White Conduit House in Islington 8<sup>th</sup> May 1842

McDouall, gave the first toast:

'The People, the only source of legitimate power.'

revived. "The demonstration on Monday exceeded that held when the Earl of Durham visited Glasgow, and was scarcely equalled by that of O'Connell. Chartism is supreme in Glasgow – Monday has settled that". McDouall spoke at other meetings in Airdrie, Aloo, Coatbridge, Dalkeith, Dumfries, Dumbarton, Dunfermline, Edinburgh, Forfar, Kilmarnock, Linlithgow, Markinch, Montrose, Stirling, St. Ninians, the Vale of Leven and several other places.

The massive demonstrations, often resulting in expressions of democratic sentiment on an unparalleled scale, revealed the existence among working people of a common aim and purpose. Precisely for this reason the question of what was the next step forward, was posed with greater urgency; and it was on this issue that Chartists were so deeply divided. In places like Dunfermline, supporters of moral force refused to sponsor McDouall's meeting and organised a rival attraction. This did not deter the Doctor's supporters, most of whom were miners, from going ahead with their demonstration, where McDouall combined an exposition of Chartist principles with a denunciation of the moderates who clamoured for an alliance with the middle class. The young Doctor still remained the idol of the extremists.

Even so, an examination of McDouall's speeches after his release from prison in 1840 indicates that his attitude to physical force had been modified. In part, this may have been merely circumspection, the fact that he had been bound over for five years to keep the peace. But also, as he made clear at the giant Manchester meeting held to celebrate his release, he no longer favoured drilling and the display of weapons in public; as a means of demonstrating Chartist strength and intimidating enemies, these had entirely failed. Also, he no longer believed in making impassioned speeches urging the use of force. Wild revolutionary utterances that led to rash acts of impetuosity in England and Wales, with disastrous consequences, were largely avoided in Scotland. As he told Edinburgh Chartists: "We gave our passions the rein; but you have been more cautious, you have suffered less – you gave the reins to reason." This did not mean that he had renounced the use of force: at the same Edinburgh meeting, he had prefaced his remarks by expressing pride in his grandfather, who had fought against British troops alongside George Washington in the American War of Independence. What he now appeared to advocate was the possession of weapons for defensive purposes. If the authorities resorted to violence in an attempt to crush Chartism, he thought the moral force men would be the first to run away.

The physical force versus moral force debate was only one of the many issues dividing Chartists. Definitely, the need to secure more coherence and unity required a new organisational form. Delegates to the 1839 Chartist Convention had generally been elected by mass meetings that anyone, whatever their views or degree of commitment, could attend. By 1840, a feeling had emerged that a more structured organisation was required; the loose form of pressure group politics had been found wanting in the events of the previous year. So, on July 20 1840, a conference was held at Manchester that led to the creation of the National Chartist Association, a body with clearly defined membership and rules.

From the outset, McDouall played a prominent part in the new organisation. He was one of the twelve signatories to the document calling the special convention. Of the delegates attending the founding gathering, McDouall was one of the two – Pitkeithly was the other – who had been delegates to the 1839 Convention. The large turnover in leading personnel can be attributed to a variety of factors – the demoralisation of certain individuals as a result of the defeats of 1839, the enforced absence of O'Connor, Frost and some others due to imprisonment or transportation, and, not least, to the point, implicit in the creation of the new organisation, that many of the old political ways would have to be altered.

By his stirring defence at his trial and his well-attended speaking tour, "the young doctor", as he was often called, had emerged as a popular and nationally known leader. It is not surprising therefore, that when the National Charter Association held elections in March 1841 to elect its executive committee, McDouall topped the poll: P.M. McDouall 3,795, J Leach 3,664, John Campbell (secretary) 2,219, Morgan Williams 2,045, George Binns 1,879, R.K. Philip 1,130. That his popularity persisted can be seen from the following year's election results, where again he came top: P.M. McDouall 11,221, J. Leach 10,830, J. Campbell 9,712, M. Williams 4,410, J. Bairstow 4,611. The appreciably higher numbers in the second election was an indication of the NCA's growth: by 1842 it claimed to have branches in 400 localities. Though this may sound impressive, the reality seems to have been less so. There is reason to believe, as the Leeds Times said, branches in many localities consisted merely of two or three individuals who met together on a quarterly basis. Moreover, in Scotland and part of the Midlands, no NCA organisation existed, because people were suspicious of its power, its professionalism and legality. Indeed, even where branches did exist, there is good reason to believe that the vast majority of Chartists remained outside its ranks. This can be shown by looking at the position in 1842. Almost

certainly, O'Connor was exaggerating when he declared: "We are 4,000,000, aye, and more"; yet probably there would be more than a million people who would describe themselves as Chartists, whereas, at the same time, the paid-up membership of the NCA was probably in the region of 20,000.

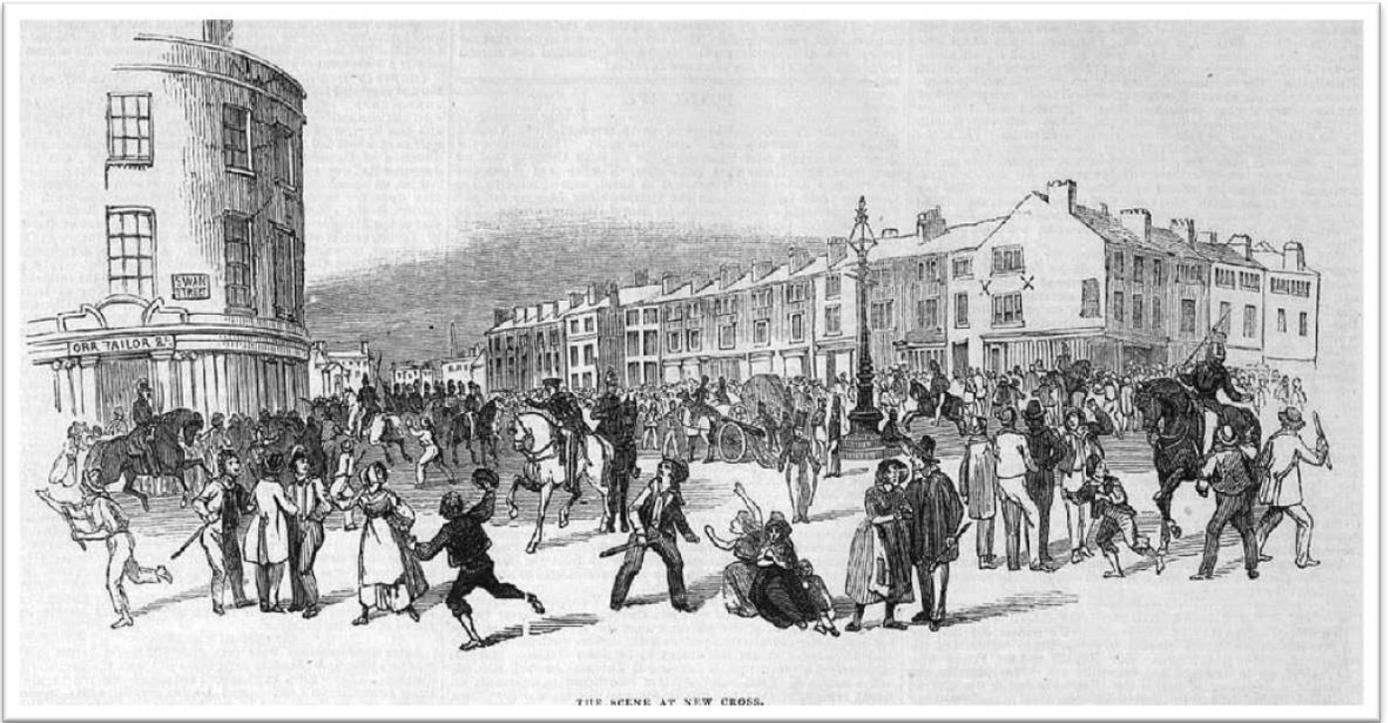
The significance of this is that it would have been virtually impossible for the NCA's small membership to provide coherence and direction to Chartism; the various other competing political tendencies as well as the comparatively immense size of Chartism's amorphous support made the NCA's task really daunting. What made it still more formidable was the very considerable local variations, as revealed in such studies as that of Asa Briggs: the local political scene had an immediacy, an urgency about it, whereas the NCA's activities nationally appeared remote and often of less relevance. But to make matters worse, far from the NCA speaking with a united voice, the differences within the broader movement found reflection inside the top echelons. O'Connor, now out of prison, thought the most pressing task was to transform the Northern Star from a weekly into a daily paper. Then Chartism would have a powerful voice, one that could not be overlooked. Bronterre O'Brien disagreed: he considered the movement's energies should be concentrated on electoral politics; in this manner Chartism would secure the maximum impact. Still another opinion came from Collins and Lovatt, who maintained workers could secure lasting improvements only when they possessed greater knowledge – education should be priority Number One. But William Benbow had different ideas and argued for them in a closely-written, 28-page document. In the midst of this confusion and plethora of proposals, however, this document appears to have been neither published nor considered.

McDouall's suggestions fared better than those of Benbow. This was largely because he, by this time, possessed his own journal – the Chartist and Republican Journal – where he could express his views. Repeatedly, he wrote articles emphasising how vital it was to build strong organisation at local level throughout the country. Past defeats he judged, could all be attributed to this cause: "Our associations were hastily got up, composed of prodigious numbers, a false idea of strength was wrought up to the highest pitch, thence originated a sense of security which subsequent events proved to be false, and why? Because no real union existed at the bottom."

McDouall's answer to the problem was to turn to the newly-forming working class; only it had the necessary potential strength. He believed Chartists should be active in the trade unions, win them over for the cause and use them as a basis for Chartist agitation. Where workers did not belong to a trade union, he still thought that they should be organised in occupational groups in furtherance of their political interests. In this way, labour would become exceedingly powerful. Concurrently with any future Chartist convention, the labour movement could demonstrate its determination by strikes and other forms of activity. As a result, the state would be too frightened to arrest Convention delegates. Also, faced with such organised might, it would be more likely to accede to Chartist demands.

The response to McDouall's proposals was patchy, with large parts of the country indifferent to it. Most support came from London and the Manchester area, where occupational branches were created. In Yorkshire too, interest was shown. Nevertheless, what turned out to be insuperable obstacles soon appeared. One difficulty was that some Chartists saw the trade unions not as possible allies but as rivals. Strange to say, as the Leeds Times reported, many Yorkshire Chartist branches had a rule that members should take part "in no agitation but for The Charter." They regarded union activity as a diversion, side-tracking people from the real struggle. Sometimes this suspicion was reciprocated. In North East England for example, some trade unionists had actually struck at the beginning of "the sacred month". Since it had turned out to be such a fiasco, some of them had severed their Chartist connections. A much greater influence, conditioning workers' attitude to McDouall's proposal, was the worsening economic situation. As the British economy slid into what Hobsbawm describes as the worst slump of the century, workers became preoccupied with the problems of wage reductions and unemployment, not to mention the survival of their small union organisations; they had no time to spare to explore the possibilities of establishing links between the unions and Chartism.

Not only McDouall's proposals but also the Chartist and Republican Journal fell victim to the darkening economic climate. Both can be seen as failures. Yet, this would be to make a superficial analysis: seeds had been sown that were soon to flourish. It is almost certainly no coincidence that when the General Strike of 1842 broke out, it was precisely in those areas where McDouall's influence had been greatest where the struggle was most vigorously fought, with the profoundest political insight. In his speeches as well as his writings, McDouall had put forward his own views, winning a large number over to his position.



**The Great Strike of 1842 – The Scene at New Cross**

Typical of his approach was the consideration of moral and physical force that appeared in his journal in the form of a discussion between a Chartist and a Whig politician. Though the latter expressed his belief in slow and peaceful change here in Britain, the Chartist had no difficulty in getting his opponent to state he supported wars overseas. Indeed, the physical force Chartist is shocked by the Whig's lack of humanity, his "slaughtering liberality" for imperialist purposes. In reply, the politician asked the Chartist whether he would not be prepared to fight if our Indian possessions were attacked by the Russians or our trade with Mexico threatened by the French? If he was not prepared to fight for these, what cause was the Chartist to take up arms over?

The Whig received a blunt, forthright answer to his question about India:

"Let all who have possessions in India, or all who profit by what you call 'our Indian possessions' be off to India, and fight a thousand battles for them if they like. Let the proprietors of the East India Stock, let the owners of East India merchantmen, let those English and Irish merchants and brokers, and writers and underwriters, and governors and judges, and naval and military officers, and liver-coloured nabobs, and all such other aristocrats and commercial speculators as have either wrung or are now wringing, fortunes out of Hindoo sweat and misery – let all such persons go and fight for our 'Indian possessions', but let them not mock our degradation by asking us working people to fight alongside them, either for our 'possessions' in India, or anywhere else, seeing that we do not possess a single acre of ground, or any other description of property in our own country, much less colonies, or 'possessions' in any other, having been robbed of everything we ever earned by the middle and upper classes."

After making it quite plain working people had nothing to gain from Britain's continued domination of India, Chartist and Republican Journal went on to state a position that savours of revolutionary defeatism: "On the contrary, we have an interest in prospective loss or ruin of all such 'possessions', seeing they are but instruments of power in the hands of our domestic oppressors. Yes, yes, by all means, let Russia seize them, if she can, and we shall but thank God and Russia for the seizure."

Yet, McDouall was no pacifist. Well aware of the horrors of war, he made it plain that he nevertheless advocated physical force since there was no alternative:

"I have so inveterate and mortal an antipathy to war (regarding it as but another name for murder and robbery on a large scale), that only the direst necessity could induce me to be, under any circumstances, its advocate; yet there is one great barbarous Power in Europe against which I would gladly see a war got up even this very day."

Mystified, the Whig politician asked whether he meant Russia, but the Chartist made it clear he was referring to "a power more barbarous and barbarising than all living despotism put together, that of Russia included". To emphasise

the point, he handed his bemused companion a copy of the previous week's Northern Liberator. This told workers never to shed their blood for the present tyrannical system. "Henceforth, if you go to war, it shall be to fight for yourselves." These remarks had a prophetic ring. A few months later, goaded by mounting poverty and starvation, people turned to violence. The wave of strikes, starting among Midland miners in the summer of 1842, spread to Lancashire and Yorkshire. There gaunt and desperate crowds roamed from town to town demanding – and persuading with force when necessary – everyone to stop work. In textile mills, production halted abruptly when the steam engines were immobilised by the simple expedient of removing the plugs to the boilers and so in Lancashire the disturbances became called "the Plug Plot Riots". In the Potteries, the homes of unpopular employers and magistrates were pillaged. At Stockport, the workhouse was attacked and bread stolen. Elsewhere, the people were so hungry that they dug up and ate the carcasses of diseased animals.

Confronted by this grave challenge to law and order, the authorities resorted to repression on an extensive scale. Police and troops attacked demonstrators. They arrested many strikers. Soldiers in Preston fired into a crowd, killing two and seriously wounding seven people. Such stern measures, however, generally did not cower the workers; it served to make them more resolute. Conferences of strikers formulated lists of demands, which included no wage reductions, a repeal of anti-working-class legislation and the enactment of The Charter.

In these circumstances, McDouall believed the Chartist Movement could make an important intervention, transforming what was primarily an economic struggle into a political one. Leadership needed to be provided. As it happened, the NCA anyway had planned to hold its regular meeting in Manchester. Delegates arrived there to find the city silent and smokeless, all the factories had closed. What were they to do? McDouall had no doubts. He moved a resolution committing the Association's members to support the strike, attempting to spread it to those parts of the country not involved and urging all workers to remain out until the Charter became law. Despite some misgivings from Feargus O'Connor, the editor of the Northern Star and a few others, conference overwhelmingly passed the motion. Then delegates asked the young doctor to write a manifesto, explaining why people everywhere should support the strike. He produced a rousing clarion call, a fiery denunciation of the present system.

Addressing the "white slaves of England", he wrote:

"labour must no longer be the common prey of masters and rulers. Intelligence has beamed upon the mind of the bondsman, and he has been convinced that all wealth, comfort and produce, everything valuable, useful and elegant, have sprung from the palms of his hands; he feels that his back thinly clad, his children breadless, himself hopeless, his mind harassed, and his body punished, that undue riches, luxury and gorgeous plenty might be heaped on the places of the taskmasters, and flooded in the granaries of the oppressor. Nature, God and reason have condemned this inequality, and in the thunder of the people's voice it must perish together."

The manifesto went on to suggest English workers would not battle on alone much longer. Chartists would bring their organisation to assist them. Once the whole working class had been mobilised, the position would be completely changed because the forces of repression were incapable of crushing an entire people in revolt:

"Englishmen! the blood of your brothers reddens the streets of Preston and Blackburn, and the murderers thirst for more. Be firm, be courageous, be men. Peace, law and order have prevailed on our side – let them be revered until your brethren in Scotland, Wales and Ireland are informed ..."

The problem was that, except in a few parts of Scotland, the strike did not spread. Even in a stronghold like Lancashire, the unity forged at the outset of the struggle appeared fragile, liable to crack. Many workers, hungry and tired, were anxious to reach local settlements. Where an employer withdrew a threatened wage cut, particularly if he had conceded a slight increase into the bargain, workers usually seized the opportunity to return to work – and forgot all about The Charter.

But the 1842 General Strike was far from being a disaster. As a recent full-length study has pointed out, it demonstrated impressive class strength and solidarity; in terms of duration and numbers of workers participating it exceeded all General Strikes throughout the world in the 19th Century. It was moreover, more successful than its only successor in Britain: the 1926 General Strike left wage cuts and weakened organisations in its wake whereas the years that followed 1842 witnessed new trade unions springing up and wage rises won.

Yet for the Chartists themselves the events of 1842 signalled a defeat. Many rued the Movement's involvement. Leaders like McDouall, hopeful a bread-and-butter struggle could successfully be given a revolutionary dimension had

been proved wrong. They had misjudged the level of consciousness, the degree of development of British workers. Instead of securing solidarity action from Scottish, Welsh and Irish workers, the Chartists had displayed their own inability to gain a response. Worse still, in the aftermath of the General Strike politicians and the press readily seized on Chartism as a scapegoat, claiming it was responsible for all the trouble. As if to corroborate this theory, Chartist leaders figured prominently among the 1,500 arrested by the authorities.

In their anguish, many Chartists also looked for a scapegoat – and found one in McDouall. He, more than anyone, had been responsible for the Movement committing itself to the Strike; therefore, he should shoulder the major responsibility for the ensuing agony, the Northern Star referred to the Doctor's "wild strain of recklessness". Feargus O'Connor blamed McDouall for his arrest, and subsequently opposed collections for McDouall in exile.

The Doctor's need for political asylum came from his being at the top of the authorities' wanted list. They had opened his correspondence for some time as well as having him under surveillance. They knew the Doctor had written both the manifesto addressed to the British people and a letter to Chartists throughout the country, dispatched by the Chartist conference at the height of the strike. The authorities wished to get their hands on him. He would have been a prime prisoner, to be tried alongside O'Connor and 57 others at Lancaster in March 1843.

But McDouall had other ideas: he had no intention, if he could help it, of having a second sojourn in one of Her Majesty's rest centres. For several months he was on the run, at times coming perilously close to arrest. What made matters worse was that in the previous two years he had been so much in the public eye. In May 1842 for instance, he rode on a white horse at the head of the procession which had presented the second Chartist petition to Parliament. Millions of friends and foes alike had heard him speak and seen his picture. He was in danger of detection at any time, anywhere. Consequently, political colleagues recommended he flee abroad. With skilful planning, he sailed secretly to France, remaining in exile there for two years.

McDouall does not appear to have remained idle while on the Continent. He seems to have established contact with people holding kindred radical views, in particular with Etienne Cabet, the man responsible for bringing the term "communism" into extensive usage. His main work, in which he expounds his political philosophy, was *The Voyage of Icarus*, which McDouall translated into English under its original title of *The Adventure of Lord William Covindale in Icaria*. Cabet acquired much of his inspiration for his left-wing opinions in England. Disillusioned by the reign of Louis-Philippe, in 1831 he began denouncing the "bourgeois" monarchy and publishing *Le Populaire*, a journal written specially for working people. Not surprisingly, the French government banned *Le Populaire*, and Cabet was forced to spend the next few years in England. In this period, he developed new ideas. Taking himself to the British Museum, he studied works by political thinkers. At the same time, he witnessed the industrial struggles occurring in Britain and discussed their significance with Owenite socialists. In 1839, back in France, he wrote his famous book, followed two years later by *Credo Communiste*. These became very popular with French workers: Heine, the German writer, noted that most of the workmen with whom he talked in the proletarian quarters of Paris in the early 1840s called themselves communists. Subsequently, Marx and Engels chose to call their pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto* – not *The Socialist Manifesto* – because, according to G.D.H. Cole, the word communist "carried with it more than 'socialist' the idea of revolutionary struggle, and had, at the same time, a clearer connection with the notion of common ownership and enjoyment. It was, Engels has explained, less 'Utopian'; it lent itself better to association with the idea of the class struggle and with the Materialist Conception of History."

By translating *The Voyage of Icarus*, McDouall simply added a further contribution to the already extensive traffic in ideas that influenced Chartism. The French Revolution provided inspiration and guidance. Bronterre O'Brien translated Buonarroti's *History of Babeuf's Conspiracy for Equality*, an account of how a left-wing sect vainly tried to turn the revolution in a socialist direction. The numerous émigrés who fled to Britain, men like Carl Schapper, Wilhelm Weitling, and Louis Oborski, helped to supply the Movement with a cosmopolitan flavour. Then, of course, there were Marx and Engels, who knew many of the leaders and contributed to Chartist journals.

# £100 REWARD.

Whereas,

A WARRANT has been issued for the APPREHENSION of  
PETER MURRAY Mc DOUALL, late of Ramsbottom,  
near Bury, Surgeon; he is better known by the name of

**DR. MC DOUALL,**  
**CHARTIST LECTURER.**

### DESCRIPTION.

He is about 27 years of age, stands about 5 ft. 6 in. high, inclined to be stout, has long dark hair, swarthy complexion, with high cheek bones, sharp black eyes, whiskers rather lighter than his hair; generally dresses in black; speaks quick, with a Scotch accent.

The above Reward will be paid by the Government to any Person who shall give such Information as will lead to the Apprehension of the said Peter Murray Mc Douall.

Information to be given to Sir CHARLES SHAW,  
Chief Commissioner of the Manchester Police.

TOWN HALL, MANCHESTER,  
September 3rd, 1843.

SIMPSON AND GILLET, PRINTERS, MARKET STREET, MANCHESTER

Offer of reward for Peter McDouall

He stood for parliament at Northampton in June 1841 but came bottom of the poll. After representing Ashton in the convention of April 1842, he was the principal supporter of the general strike movement in August and it was he who drafted the executive's very forceful address to the people. The government offered a £100 reward for his apprehension, but he escaped to France, where he lived for the next two years. He was able to return to Britain without prosecution during 1844 and resumed his life of a Chartist agitator, publishing *The Charter: "What It Means! The Chartists: What They Want!"* in 1845.

1848 was Europe's Year of Revolutions. He spoke at rally after rally spurring masses of people into self-activity. After he spoke at Glasgow in March a riot occurred, followed by another in Edinburgh, where there were shouts of "Vive la Republique" and "Bread and Revolution". Although McDouall's presence led the authorities to link him with the disturbances, it seems that those responsible were destitute Irish and unemployed Scots.

But, whatever its sources of inspiration, Chartism experienced a lean period. Following the 1842 devastation, an upswing came, bringing greater wealth to all sections of society. In the clamour to make money,

workers tended to forget the demands for sweeping political changes they had campaigned for so vehemently a couple of years before. The authorities, anxious to improve still further the political climate, wished to dispel causes for lingering bitterness, they hinted, therefore, that McDouall would not be prosecuted if he returned to Britain.

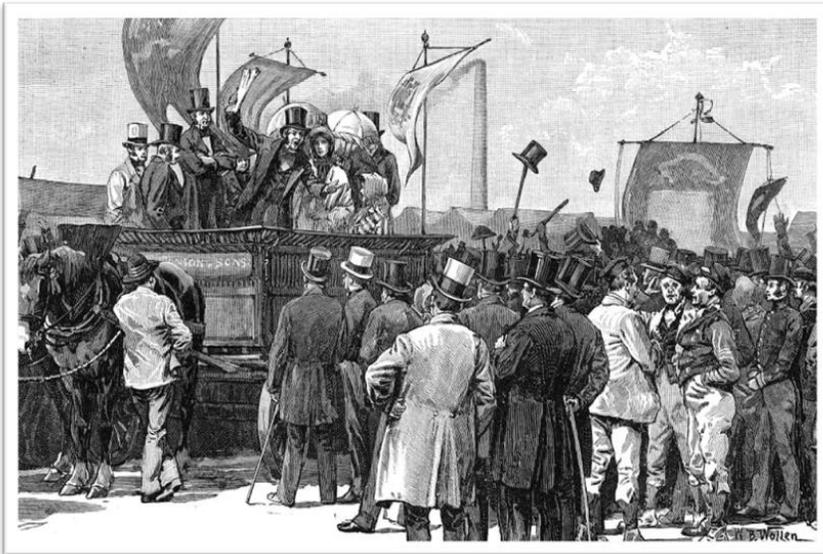
No mass meetings, as there had been in 1839, took place to celebrate the young Doctor's homecoming. Support had shrunk: no English branch now possessed a membership of more than 200. In each locality, the hardcore of activists remaining were prone to indulge in mutual recriminations, wrongly blaming each other for the Movement's misfortunes. Only a revival would restore unity, restoring a fighting spirit in the Movement. For that reason, McDouall went to campaign in Scotland, where the organisation was displaying greater liveliness than in England. Yet, even in Scotland, he encountered deep dissensions. Many Chartists harboured a personal dislike for O'Connor and regarded the National Charter Association as an inefficient body, not providing proper leadership. A separate Scottish organisation, they believed, would be more responsive, less remote than the NCA to problems north of the border. When McDouall arrived in Glasgow, he found two rival branches, the smaller one having English affiliation. To create greater effectiveness, he recommended that they merge and strive to build a strong Scottish Chartist Association before worrying about relations with the English one.

His proposal aroused a howl of protest from the English leaders, who judged it to be a devious move by McDouall to build an alternative power-base for himself. It seemed particularly reprehensible that, sent to Scotland under the auspices of the NCA, he should suggest disaffiliation from that body. The executive issued a statement: "Dr. McDouall is lecturing exclusively on his own account; and, as far as we know, is not lecturing for the Chartist cause."

McDouall tried to justify his action, relating it to the perilous condition of the Movement: "The cause of failure does not lie with the plan of organisation, or with the leaders. It rests with the people who had sunk into a deep sleep of apathy, from which nothing seems capable of arousing them. I simply suggested that, as all had apparently failed in Scotland, the best plan would be to appeal to her nationality."

This explanation failed to quell the quarrel; indeed, it only served to open old sores. Some remembered the money for his subsistence while he lived in France; they resented that such a scarce commodity had been squandered in this way. In reply, McDouall had criticised Feargus O'Connor's role in the 1842 General Strike. This brought O'Connor into the fray. He wanted the Manchester Chartist Council to appoint a tribunal to investigate the disagreements between himself and the Doctor. McDouall retorted that the Manchester Chartist Council was not an appropriate body to consider the case. In the meanwhile, O'Connor had swung the Northern Star, with considerable influence, behind him. McDouall was virtually compelled to end his association with the NCA. He contented himself with addressing groups, up and down the country, who invited him to speak. Time gradually mellowed the hostility between himself and the supporters of O'Connor; increasingly his talent became again recognised, and it was appreciated that the Movement was the loser if he continued to be kept outside the leadership primarily because of what had happened in 1842. So, in August 1846, a reconciliation occurred: he became an NCA lecturer once more and his activities were favourably reported in the Northern Star. However, the NCA's lack of finance curbed his activities on its behalf. Sent on a lecturing tour of the North East, McDouall was taken off the Association's payroll. Despite appeals from Martin Jude and Jane Sibbett on behalf of the Newcastle Chartists, the NCA refused to relent. The Doctor then suggested that he should do a course on agricultural chemistry, but the lectures were badly attended, and Newcastle Chartists, having bought equipment for the course, were left with a £3 debt.

Even so, McDouall's knowledge of agriculture, combined with his oratorical skill, made him an eminently suitable advocate for O'Connor's Land Plan. Industrial workers in many towns, painfully aware of their drab lives, expressed enthusiasm for the Plan. The prospect of having a small holding, situated in an idyllic rural setting, had great appeal. No wonder McDouall was so well received when he spoke at Preston. He contrasted the advantage of living in a low-rented Chartist cottage, with land attached, to a high-rented Lancashire slum, with no land. What must have made it still more appealing, he told the meeting an unskilled labourer could learn agricultural methods better than a farmer. Actually, O'Connor's Land Plan contained a fatal flaw. Smallholdings could not compete with the big farmers, employing the most up-to-date machinery and scientific methods. An attempt to turn the clock back, the Plan was doomed not to succeed. Whether McDouall realised this is unclear; it maybe he joined the Land Company because it gave him a regular income and provided him with a platform from which he could expound his views of more general matters. Some time in the winter of 1847-8 he resigned, claiming he could no longer add to the membership or capital of the Land Company.

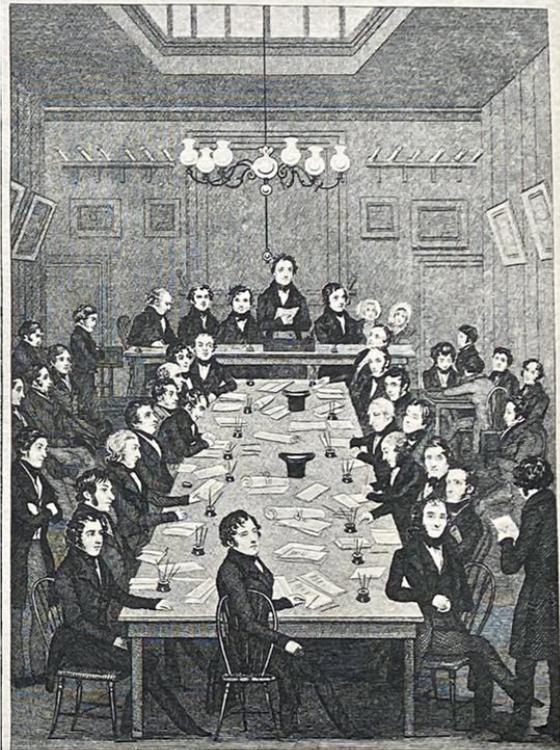


A Chartist Rally

More pressing issues had arisen. Again, Britain had entered a trade depression. Hunger and unemployment stalked the country. Chartism started to revive, as agitation began to present a third petition. From the government's standpoint, this unwelcome renewal of activity happened in a period of deep anxiety. Having suffered from the potato famine, Ireland was experiencing violent unrest. For the first time, Irish nationalists had expressed a willingness to join forces with the Chartists to fight the common enemy. Doubtless, they would be encouraged in their seditious activities by the success of similar struggles elsewhere – for 1848 was the Year of Revolutions, the overthrow of despotic regimes from one end of Europe to the other.

In these circumstances, McDouall threw himself into the campaign. Not sparing himself, he spoke at rally after rally, rekindling the revolutionary fervour, and spurring masses of people into self-activity. After he spoke at Glasgow in March a riot occurred, followed by another in Edinburgh, where there were shouts of "Vive la Republique" and "Bread and Revolution". Although McDouall's presence in the neighbourhood led the authorities to link him with the disturbances, it seems that those responsible were destitute Irish and unemployed Scots. Returning to England once he

had completed a tour of Scotland, the Doctor stopped in Carlisle as soon as he ascertained a parliamentary by-election was taking place. Nominated as a Chartist candidate, he gave a rousing speech at the hustings and was elected by a large show of hands. However, when the ballot was held, he lost by 55 votes to 414. Undeterred, McDouall rushed on to the Midlands, where, as well as other meetings, he addressed 10,000 people at Nottingham.



MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL CONVENTION

The Chartists second Convention April 1842  
(Dr. McDouall lower left)

The Chartist Convention opened in London on 4 April. Each delegate reported on the prevailing mood in the region he represented. Soon it became obvious that the general feeling would brook no delay or compromise. Chartists had grown tired of petitioning: The Charter had to be won by moral force if possible, by physical force if necessary. The Convention resolved to hold a mass demonstration at Kensington Common on 10 April, followed by a procession to Parliament to present the petition. If MPs rejected it, a National Assembly would be convened to consider other forms of action.

McDouall was not a delegate to the Chartist Convention. Since he played a leading part in the preceding agitation, this may at first seem rather strange. But almost certainly he was deeply involved in the debate about the adoption of ulterior measures. As Thomas Cooper remarked, "Plotters and planners were as plentiful as blackberries in 1848." Eventually, in these intense, heated discussions, the proposals appeared to have been whittled down to two – the British government would be toppled either on 12 June or 15 August.

Naturally, Her Majesty's Government did not wish to witness its own demise. Elaborate counter measures were taken. New laws were enacted, special constables enrolled, and London was turned into an armed camp. Then, in a tense atmosphere, cabinet ministers waited to see what Chartist reactions would be to banning their proposed

march on Parliament. It turned out to be very much an anti-climax. Overawed by superior military force, the march on Parliament was abandoned. When the Chartist petition was examined in detail, it was found not to have 5,700,000 signatures, but only 1,975,496. Much relieved, politicians felt they could laugh at the Chartists.

Following Parliament's dismissal of The Charter, members of the National Assembly gathered in London on 1 May. They came with reports of widespread anger in the provinces. In some localities, large numbers of workers were arming, drilling, forming paramilitary organisations. The big question was: What was to be done? McDouall advanced two propositions. The first, which they rejected, sought to give the Movement wider appeal through the acceptance of economic, political and social policies that furthered working class interests. His second suggestion – the adoption of a centralised, disciplined structure for Chartism – secured the National Assembly's assent. Under an executive of five, they appointed 10 commissioners for the various regions. Their duties were to control the district brigades, also consisting often members, and these in turn would have classes – perhaps today we would say cells – operating at grassroots level. Significantly, this organisational form was similar to that of the United Irishmen, and may be taken as a sign of their influence. It gave the advantage of quick mobilisation as well as greater security from State repression.

It is instructive to examine who were elected to the provisional executive committee. It included Ernest Jones, who had been the foremost advocate of physical force at the Chartist Convention. Then there was James Leach, responsible for the delicate negotiations with the Irish confederates. The Irish paper *The Nation* had proclaimed "whenever the people of both countries were united, the oppressors of both would fall." Elaborate plans for simultaneous uprising of the British and Irish people were agreed; James Leach would command the struggle in Britain. A third member, Samuel Kidd, had concentrated on improving liaison with the trade unions, while a fourth – J. McCrae – came from Scotland, where Chartists had created armed National Guards. Dr. Peter Murray McDouall sat as the fifth member of the executive.

Understandably, cabinet ministers, who had been laughing at the farce at Kensington Common in April, became increasingly apprehensive. In his private diary, Sir Charles Greville conceded “the government are now getting uneasy about the Chartists.” During the past few weeks, he discerned “a great change for the worse among the people, an increasing spirit of discontent and disaffection, and many who on 10 April went out as special constables declare they would not do so again.” What worried the Earl of Arundel was the presence in the country of so many French and Germans with seditious and socialist designs. For the government, Lord Lansdowne admitted the threat from foreign revolutionaries: “There are 40,000 or 50,000 persons not only prepared but desirous to seize the opportunity of taking part in overturning the government.” When The Times which had estimated 15,000 attended the Kensington Common demonstration, reported on 29 May that 80,000 working people had assembled without warning and marched in paramilitary fashion to Finsbury Park, it must have sent a shiver down many an upper-class spine.

It is difficult to discern exactly what were the tactics of the physical force Chartists in this period. Functioning in a semi-clandestine manner, they naturally did not want their plans known to the authorities. But clearly, they wished to avoid a premature uprising, one where the military could deliver a devastating blow, demoralising their supporters before full armed strength could be achieved. Another Newport tragedy could occur either because of Chartist over-exuberance or provocation from the authorities. It seems just such an eventuality resulted in McDouall being sent to Bradford on 28 May by the executive. Thousands marched into the town from Halifax, Keighley, Bingley and surrounding places, brandishing their pikes and assorted weapons. They heard McDouall call on them to continue arming, but also to keep the peace and avoid any premature outbreak. Even so, the day did not pass without incident: Chartists fought with dragoons and special constables, who made 18 arrests, although in the city itself the predominance of the rebels was so overwhelming that it became a no-go area for troops and police.

From Bradford, McDouall travelled back to London, where he addressed a meeting on Clerkenwell Green the next day. The sentencing of the Irish leader Mitchell to 14 years transportation added further venom to the protests. Along with calls for democracy, McDouall and others demanded Irish independence and the freeing of Mitchell. After the meeting, a procession formed. It marched along several roads until it encountered the police in Redcross Street and a fight ensued. The following night the police drove the crowd from the Green without allowing the meeting to take place. The same pattern was repeated elsewhere. On 4 June, the authorities broke up a mass meeting, arresting Ernest Jones.

It was the intention of one Chartist, Thomas Ford Frost, which he had discussed with McDouall, to hold a diversionary meeting on the outskirts of London to make the authorities divide their forces. Meanwhile, back in London McDouall strove to defuse the situation and prevent an armed clash with the military. Riding to Bishop Bonner’s Field in a cab and finding it ringed with troops, the Doctor succeeded in persuading supporters not to assemble there. A number of

# CHARTIST DEMONSTRATION!!

**“PEACE and ORDER” is our MOTTO!**

**TO THE WORKING MEN OF LONDON.**

Fellow Men,—The Press having misrepresented and vilified us and our intentions, the Demonstration Committee therefore consider it to be their duty to state that the grievances of us (the Working Classes) are deep and our demands just. We and our families are pining in misery, want, and starvation! We demand a fair day’s wages for a fair day’s work! We are the slaves of capital—we demand protection to our labour. We are political serfs—we demand to be free. We therefore invite all well disposed to join in our peaceful procession on

**MONDAY NEXT, April 10,**

As it is for the good of all that we seek to remove the evils under which we groan.

*The following are the places of Meeting of THE CHARTISTS, THE TRADES, THE IRISH CONFEDERATE & REPEAL BODIES:*

**East Division on Stepney Green at 8 o’clock; City and Finsbury Division on Clerkenwell Green at 9 o’clock; West Division in Russell Square at 9 o’clock; and the South Division in Peckham Fields at 9 o’clock, and proceed from thence to Kennington Common.**

*Signed on behalf of the Committee, JOHN ARNOTT, Sec.*

Henry Hincham, Printer, 3, Edward Street, Hoxton Road.

things may have prompted McDouall's decision. All evidence pointed to the government retaining, albeit with one or two notable exceptions, the loyalty of the police and military. In these circumstances, in any blood-letting the authorities would emerge victorious. Moreover, the arming of the people remained at a primitive stage: in most places the process had hardly begun, in those where it had, the weapons usually consisted of pikes – really not a match for a modern, well-disciplined army. Then McDouall probably took into consideration the arrest of his colleague, Ernest Jones, who along with himself was the most influential member of the executive. To make matters worse, the receipt of money by the headquarters dried up; on 15 June the executive committee's secretary reported that it would have to suspend activities unless funds were forthcoming. While this could be taken as an indication of dwindling support, another explanation is that the authorities deliberately interfered with the post in order to sabotage the Chartists' efforts. F.C. Mather for instance claims: "The opening of private correspondence by the Post Office was never more widely practised".



**The Chartist Rally on Kennington Common 1848**

But the struggle was not over. McDouall journeyed to the industrial North, where the links with the Irish had grown strongest. The revolutionary fervour reached its highest pitch, as the Doctor found out when he addressed meetings, in Lancashire and Yorkshire. The menace thus constituted to the established order, necessitated a pre-emptive strike, beheading the conspiracy before 15th August, the proposed date for the uprising. The forces of law and order, therefore, arrested the ringleaders, including McDouall, who had been under surveillance for some time. It happened at his old stronghold of Ashton-under-Lyne. A thousand people heard him speak at the Charleston meeting house. The Chief constable of Ashton, Robert Newton, tried to secure entry, but the chairman, Richard Pilling, denied him access. Once the meeting ended, a crowd of 500 to 600 escorted the Doctor to his sleeping quarters at the Oddfellows Arms. In response to cheering from outside the public house, he addressed the multitude from a window for about 20 minutes. Scattered among the crowd were policemen, whose ears "all opened and closed at the same moment, and took in exactly the same."

Later, they alleged in court that the Doctor had told his audience discontent existed throughout society; it was not confined to the unemployed. Even in the army there was disgruntlement. At Woolwich barracks the soldiers had mutinied while the Horse Guards elected a committee to redress their grievances. He urged his listeners to continue

drilling and training. They should also ask the disaffected soldiers to supply them with weapons. Probably only about 10,000 troops remained loyal to the government – “What are they to five million people?” he is alleged to have asked. The police arrested the Doctor, charging him with sedition, illegal assembly and riot. They placed him in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day. Hot water pipes ran through his cell, making it excessively hot. He removed his coat, waistcoat and finally trousers rather than complain, which “would be regarded as a triumph for the enemy”. His case came before the Liverpool Assizes on 17 August. The hearing took place in an atmosphere unfavourable to the defence when the sensational events of the past few days must have been uppermost in most people’s minds.

On 14 August some Ashton Chartists encountered two policemen in Bentinck Street. They shot PC James Bright dead; his companion ran off, hiding in an unlit cottage. The Ashton affair, resulting in 22 arrests, was merely one of several such incidents. In Manchester Chartists and Irish Confederates tried to seize the city, marching in from 100 directions. At Bradford, led by ‘Wat Tyler’ and Lightowler, Chartists planned to blow up the gasworks and so put out the street lighting. In the confusion that followed, they wanted to take local magistrates hostage and capture the city centre. In London, the insurrection, led by William Cuffay, a coloured man, intended to assemble in four places – Clerkenwell Green, Tower Hamlets, Broadway West and Seven Dials – by 9.20 p.m., and then move off, causing fires as a diversion while they secured control of the seats of government.

In these, and other, schemes, they were defeated by the government. The authorities usually had foreknowledge from their spies who had infiltrated the various organisations. They had superior communications – including the recently invented telegraph – and therefore could deploy their force to better advantage. They were also far better trained and equipped. In all instances they succeeded in capturing the main plotters, in the case of Cuffay & Co., just as they were about to embark on their enterprise.

Beneath these relatively superficial reasons for failure lay the deeper, underlying reason analysed by Karl Marx. In his writing during 1848, he dealt comparatively briefly with Britain. This was because he believed that Britain’s relationship with the rest of the world meant a revolution was just not on:

“Those who correctly assess England and the role she plays in modern history were not surprised that the continental revolutions passed over her without leaving a trace for the time being. England is a country which, through her industry and commerce, dominates all the revolutionary nations of the Continent and nevertheless remains relatively independent of her customers because she dominates the Asian, American and Australian markets.”

The growth of the British economy, the immense accretion of wealth not only increased the power and confidence of the ruling class but also provided lower echelons with a stake in society, the prospect of social mobility as development increased the number of professional and supervisory jobs going. In a sense, Kensington Common, for example, was more impressive as a counter-demonstration than as a demonstration – the fact that 150,000 businessmen, traders and others showed their loyalty to the system. The failure of the uprising and the arrest of conspirators involved, provided a backcloth against which McDouall’s trial took place. He only received a two-year sentence whereas Cuffay and many of his colleagues were transported to Australia. The relatively lenient treatment of the Doctor can, at least partly, be attributed to the labours of W.P. Roberts, his tireless lawyer. Even so, his treatment in prison gave cause for alarm among his friends, who feared he would not survive the ordeal, the poor food and lack of exercise. Papers like the Liverpool Journal, however, expressed pleasure because McDouall was being treated as a common criminal, not a political prisoner. Some warders insulted Chartist inmates, deliberately making their conditions as bad as possible. But this does not appear to have unduly worried McDouall, who spent his time writing poetry and a work on Agricultural Chemistry.

His main concern was the fate of his wife Anne and four small children. They had no source of income and no financial reserves. As the Northern Star pointed out: “When he came among you, he had good property in Scotland, a profession and a practice, which realised him several hundred pounds annually, besides a large sum of accumulated money in the bank. All of which has been spent long ago in the advocacy of the rights of the people.” At Mrs McDouall’s suggestion, a fund was set up, with Andrew McFee, of 6 Augustine Street, St. Martins, Liverpool, as treasurer, to acquire a small shop for her, so providing an independent income. This was done: she moved from Front Portland Street, Liverpool, to a small business selling newspapers and general goods. The shop failed because it was dependent of the custom of 1,600 at Berry’s foundry, Liverpool, where a protracted industrial dispute occurred. By February 1850, Mrs. McDouall and her family were suffering “actual starvation”. With the passing months, the situation did not improve. In June 1850, James Sedlif visited Mrs. McDouall and discovered her eldest child, a 10-year-old girl, had

just died: “the mother sat, the large tears dropping on the dead body, not a sixpence in the house or a mouthful of food.” Little, if any, improvement in their condition happened before August 1850, when her husband was released from prison.

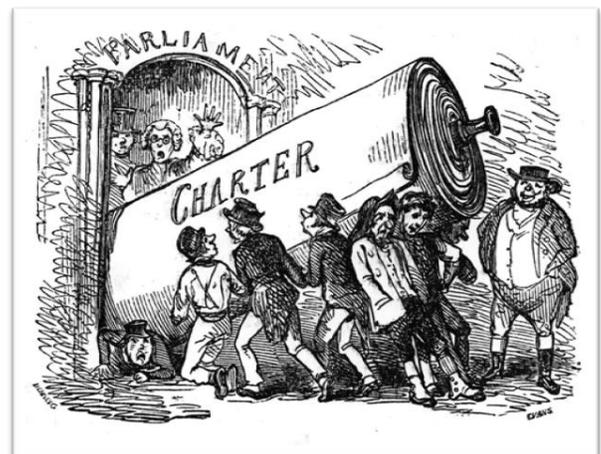
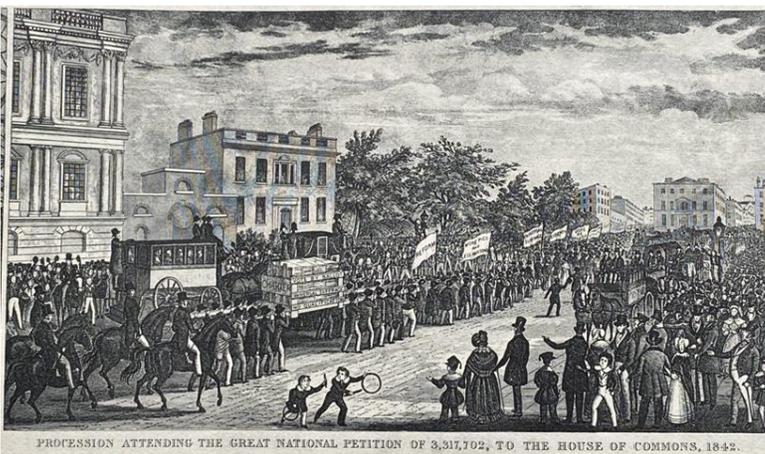
Together they returned to Ashton-under-Lyne. The Red Republican reported he had returned to medical practice in Park Parade: “we trust he will meet with popular, permanent and paying support.” Mr. Aitken, an Ashton schoolmaster, began a subscription intended to assist in the purchase of necessary medical equipment. But this initial effort does not seem to have succeeded, for two years later the People’s Paper reported the formation of a committee, with Thomas Fildes, of Manchester, as chairman, to re-establish him in medical practice. It remains equally doubtful whether this second attempt succeeded, so in 1854 he decided to emigrate to Australia. Aboard The President, it was thought that he drowned off the Australian coast when the vessel was shipwrecked (a story that turned out not to be true). Helped by some charitable people, his widow and her children returned to England. For a while they lived in a workhouse at Everton, but a nationwide appeal, organised by Nottingham Chartists, successfully established her in a stationery business at No. 9 Tradesmen’s Mart, Nottingham. That is the last we hear of her.

## Conclusion

It would be far more fitting for the Scottish people to commemorate a red-blooded rebel than a blue-blooded royal. Chartism has been Britain’s biggest and most significant mass revolutionary movement to date. In the 1830s and 1840s it mobilised millions of workers. Peter Murray McDouall remained a Chartist leader throughout these turbulent years. Furthermore, in every major battle – 1839, 1842, 1848 – he consistently advocated the same policies. McDouall was the foremost exponent of physical force.

The emergence of an industrialised society created a working class; McDouall’s unique contribution was his endeavour to harness this fresh force in the struggle. He envisaged the use of industrial militancy for political ends. Chartism required organised labour as an essential component. Equally, to be successful it required a new kind of political structure. Here, in some respects, McDouall favoured a type of organisation that appears to closely resemble the Bolshevik’s democratic centralism – a tightly-knit, disciplined group of revolutionaries. He warned his followers: “Centralization and organisation are weapons of the government, and until you can successfully imitate their tactics, you never can reduce their power.” Increasingly, Chartists came to realise the correctness of this view.

He was, in anyone’s book, a romantic figure, marrying the daughter of his gaoler at Chester, a national leader of a movement that was ahead of its time - its six-point Charter of parliamentary reform was gradually and largely achieved, but not until 1918. McDOUALL was by 1842, virtually the national leader of the Chartist Movement, heading on horseback the two-mile-long procession which delivered on 2nd May the movement’s three-million-name National Petition to the House of Commons.



From April 1842, a new Chartist Convention met and launched another Petition, which gained over three million signatures. It was delivered to parliament, and when laid out end to end, it was said to be three miles long.

But his critics have depicted him as a hothead whose demagoguery cost other people’s lives and freedom. At Hyde in 1839, he had urged a Chartist meeting to resist by armed force if soldiers were called out against them, an action which led to his imprisonment for one year. He had been procuring muskets and bayonets for stockpiling in Ashton-under-Lyne, if credence is to be placed on the deposition of a Birmingham gunmaker obtained by the Home Office’s network of intelligence agents. It may be that he was behind the trove of assorted weaponry discovered in cottages in Bolton Street

(no. 72) and Ramsbottom Lane in the late 19th Century. Mark HOVELL, potentially one of Chartism's ablest historians up to his premature death in World War I, concluded of McDOWALL: his veracity and good faith were more than disputable, and his constant change of policy ... as much due to self-interest as to instability. He was one of the least attractive, as well as most violent of the Chartist champions.

However, in attempting to make an evaluation of Peter Murray McDouall, it must be remembered that the British working class was still in an early stage of development. Chartism can be regarded as its first organised expression, sustained on a nationwide basis for a number of years, that actually required serious consideration from the established order. Significantly, from the outset the Movement was riven by a division between supporters of physical force and those who believed in moral force; in fact, the two camps – revolutionaries and reformists – continue in working-class politics right down to the present-day. McDouall was the most well known and consistent representative of the revolutionary tendency. He saw the need for stern and resolute action; the revolutionary who vacillates is lost. He realised the need, which no French revolutionary discerned, that any threat to the existing system, to be effective, would have to come from the working class, spearheaded by a small group of disciplined revolutionaries.

In the changed climate after 1848, McDouall became very much "a superfluous man"; like the intelligentsia in mid-19th century Tsarist Russia, social development left him out of tune with the age, an individual with no part to play. His emigration to Australia may have been prompted, at least in part, by a feeling of unease. He did not fit into a period of social harmony, a time when labour leaders became advocates of small deeds and humble virtues, of a thousand tiny reforms rather than one big revolution. For more than half a century it looked as if he belonged to a species that had become extinct.

### **Peter Murray McDouall Ancestry**

His father, Andrew, was known locally as 'Will Wander, the poet of the Cree'. He produced verse such as *Will Wander of Benarrows Trip to America*. He died in 1842 in Newton Stewart. Little else is known about him or his wife and their two daughters. His grandfather (unnamed) had fought for the cause of freedom by enlisting in George Washington's army as a soldier serving in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century American War of Independence. His uncle was Peter McDouall, the Baillie of Newton Stewart, an office similar to that of an alderman or magistrate. He established a trust fund for his nephew's education, enabling him to embark on his medical degree, serving a 5-year apprenticeship with Dr. McMillan, a local surgeon.

Dr. McDouall married his wife Mary Ann, the daughter of one of his gaolers, in Glasgow in 1840. Bruce McDowall notes: 'I believe that they did marry in Scotland, but there doesn't appear to be an extant record of the fact. If they were married by a minister of one of the secession branches of the Presbyterian Church, the chances of there being a surviving record are slim. Also, there were parishes of the established Church where the records were not well kept. I am also thinking that the session clerk may not have made an entry in the register because neither of the couple were resident in the parish. He possibly gave them a letter certifying that he had married them. That would have made it easier for getting their children baptised in England where they were residing most of the time. In most cases where a marriage is found, it is actually a record of the proclamation of intent. If you are lucky, the session clerk will also record a date and even a place of marriage. It's nice when a place is given, as that is usually the family home of the bride. That can help in knowing who her parents were. It is rare that parents' names are included, and then it may just be one of the fathers.'

By 1848 he had four children, however his eldest daughter died at the age of 10 in June 1850 in Liverpool, while he was serving a prison sentence in Kirkdale gaol. In 1854, when Mary Ann, then a widow, returned to England from Australia, she had five children aged between 2 and 12.

That is all the information we have on his family. Bruce McDowall, who searched high and low, concludes, 'I doubt that we will ever be able to work out how his father Andrew fits in, or the identity of his mother. I have three candidates, at least two of whom may be the one person, but there is not enough data to progress from there. I'm just hoping that something unexpected arises. Even without that, Peter himself makes an interesting story. A tragic but honorable and talented individual.'

## His Death

Bruce adds: Death registrations in Victoria are similar to those in Scotland, some handy details, but that depends on the knowledge of the informant. There was no Peter Murray McDOWALL or McDAWALL in the index, but I did wonder about this entry: (*clerical errors in the spelling of names and estimation of ages were common*)

**Family name** MCDUGAL, **Given name(s)** Peter, **Event** Death, **Mother's name / Spouse's name** Unknown, **Mother's family name at birth** Unknown, **Father's name** Unknown, **Place of birth** --, **Place of death** --, **Spouse at Death** --, **Age at Death** 38, **Reg. year** 1854, **Reg. number** 1158/1854.

Clearly, the informant didn't know some details, therefore I ordered an image and here is the transcription:

**Died** 12 Mar 1854, **Hospital** Melbourne / Peter McDougal, Surgeon / Male 38 years / Phthisis, 1 months, Certified Wm. Garrard, [last seen] 11 March / [Parents not entered] / [Informant] Peter Grimm, Present at Death, Hospital Melbourne / [Deputy Registrar] Edw B Arnold, Dy. Registrar. Thirteenth March 1854, Register Office, Melbourne / New Cemetery, Melbourne / [Burial Witness] Jon Greames / 6 months in Victoria / Married, Wife in Scotland / [No issue listed].

[Phthisis: pulmonary tuberculosis]

Bruce continues: He did come here though and 1854 appears to be correct, as that is when he presented his credentials to the Medical Board and was registered to practice here in Victoria. His registration appears in the Government Gazette through to 1862. I put the question of the Victorian Gazette to experienced family historians, and the thought was that once registered as a doctor, P.M. McDOWALL's name would have carried forward to subsequent editions until the editor became aware of his death, so death in 1854 was certainly possible.

How many surgeons by this name and age would have been in Melbourne? This has to be our man.

According to some published accounts his wife was actually in England, but she possibly initially went to relations of Peter in Scotland. She certainly wasn't present at his death. The story about him dying on the President in a shipwreck was incorrect, but what I believe is that he had been treating prisoners on board that vessel and contracted TB. The prison hulks were terrible for spreading TB and other diseases. Mary Ann thought that it was moored off the coast, but large as Port Philip Bay is, it is not the ocean. Nor was the President a wreck, but perhaps Mary Ann confused the terminology. Mary's version may have been further blurred when conveyed via journalists and other Chartists.

The story about him emigrating and dying on the shipwreck of the "President" was soon discredited when I found that it only operated between the USA and Australia, and that it became used as a prison hulk rather than being wrecked. The newspaper article *Shipping Intelligence* solved the issue of how he did emigrate to Australia, and the timing. There is no extant passenger list for this ship, at least not held by the Public Records Office of Victoria, so he doesn't appear on their index. Being hired as the ship's surgeon superintendent, he was crew rather than passenger, and occupying a cabin, he was mentioned in the newspaper. As he was actually emigrating, he should have been recorded on the passenger list, but we can't check that list. That's a pity, as presumably Mary Anne and the children would also have been listed. I wonder if they were also in the cabin.

Peter didn't wait long before presenting his credentials to the Medical Board and advertise his services. It's a safe bet that he provided service to the prisoners on the "President", but I have to wonder if he was hired to do so or if that was pro bono. The latter would be consistent with his social conscience, so possibly the case. The story of him dying on the "President" must have had some basis, even though incorrect, as why else would that particular ship become propagated back in England. Here are the newspaper clips:

### **The Argus, Mon 24 Oct 1853, Page 4 Col 1. (Melbourne, Vic.: 1848 - 1957)**

SHIPPING INTELLIGENCE. ARRIVED.

October 23.—Goldfinder, ship, 1380 tons, Hugh Stewart, from Liverpool 23rd July. Passengers—cabin: P. M. McDouall, surgeon superintendent, Mr. and Mrs. Scott and family, Mr. Grable, Mr. Ellis, and five hundred and twenty-eight second and third class passengers. Willis, Merry and Co., agents.

**October 23 —Goldfinder, ship, 1280 tons, Hugh Stewart, from Liverpool 23rd July. Passengers—  
cabin: P. M. M'Donnell, surgeon superintendent, Mr. and Mrs. Scott and family, Mr. Grable, Mr. Ellis, and five hundred and twenty-eight second and third class passengers. Willis, Merry and Co., agents.**

The Argus, Thu. 3 Nov 1853, Page 2 Col 3, Advertising

DR P. M. M[*c*]DOUALL, Surgeon Of the Goldfinder, who brought from Liverpool 583 passengers and crew, losing only three adult invalids, and one infant out of 76 children, is ready to accept any professional appointment which may secure to him a proper remuneration for the strict performance of his duty; direct Robinson's boarding-house, 196 Elizabeth street.

**D**R P. M. M DOUALL, Surgeon O' the Goldfinder, who brought from Liverpool 583 passengers and crew, losing only three adult invalids, and one infant out of 76 children is ready to accept any professional appointment which may secure to him a proper remuneration for the strict performance of his duty; direct Robinson's boarding-house, 196 Elizabeth street.  
58 y

Bruce concludes: 'Thus we have made some progress with Peter. I doubt that we will ever be able to work out how his father Andrew fits in, or the identity of his mother. I have three candidates, at least two of whom may be the one person, but there is not enough data to progress from there. I'm just hoping that something unexpected arises. Even without that, Peter himself makes an interesting story, a tragic but honorable and talented individual.'

## Nigel Jepson pens biography of Peter Murray McDouall



**THE fascinating story of a young Scottish doctor who opened a medical practice in Ramsbottom nearly 200 years ago is told in a new book (2021).**

Ramsbottom's Revolutionary Doctor is the latest book by former **Bolton** headteacher and local resident Nigel Jepson who happened by chance to see the name of Peter Murray McDouall on a blue plaque, which pays testimony to the brief but highly eventful life of the doctor.

"Everywhere I looked, both in Ramsbottom and beyond, the story seemed to become more interesting. Just from a purely local history perspective for example, McDouall is arriving on the scene at a time when the main changes are taking place which created the Ramsbottom town-centre of today.

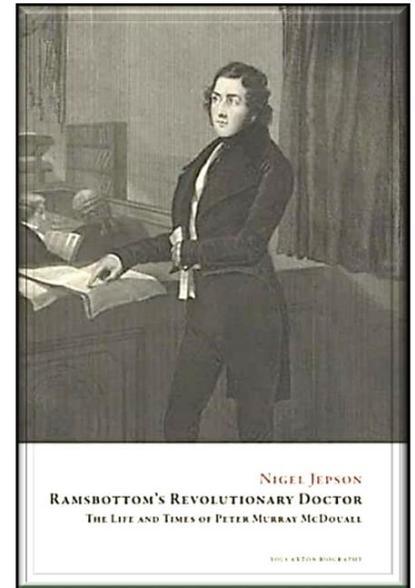
"Beyond this though is the compelling story of the extent to which McDouall came personally to commit himself, on a national basis, to seeking to improve the lives of all those at the mercy of having to suffer the huge social and economic hardships of those times."

The doctor was shocked by the conditions that local factory workers faced in the mills. But there was little he could do to bring about change so he joined the ranks of the Chartist movement.

Jepson writes about McDouall: 'Coming down from Scotland to set up his practice in Ramsbottom in 1835 at the age of 21, life as a doctor had opened his eyes to the poor standard of health of working people. McDouall felt a need to address the situation in ways that went beyond day-to-day treatment of patients, down to the root causes of often shocking levels of hardship. Almost straight away he laid blame at the door of the factory system and the merciless way in which it operated.'

'Meanwhile, those in authority stubbornly kept turning a blind eye to the ever greater hardships being suffered by the working population. The underlying aim behind every measure of parliament that was enacted was to preserve society in which the privileged few maintained its traditional power over the masses. The young doctor would quickly realise that there was little else for the workers to do in town but to drink their sorrows away during the limited time they were freed from the purgatory of slogging away at factory machines.'

'It was not long before his firebrand style of expression succeeded in establishing his reputation further afield and making him a household name amongst the ranks of the working class across the country. McDouall showed he was never afraid to pit himself against authority if he felt the moral imperative to do so. The need to address the plight of the workers trapped inside the iniquitous factory system, was an issue he would never back away from.'



Nigel Jepson's book:  
*Ramsbottom's Revolutionary Doctor*  
*The Life and Times of Peter Murray McDouall*

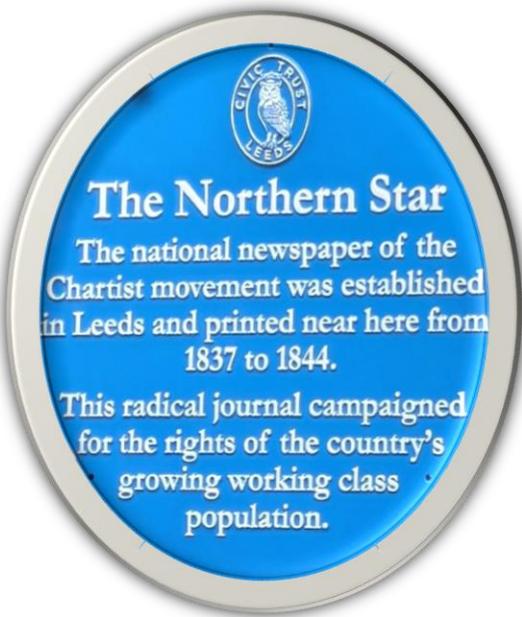
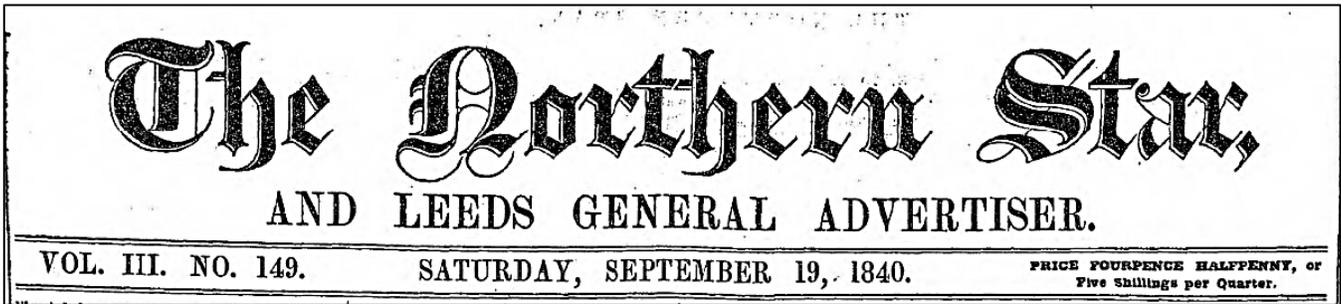
#### **From the 2003 edition of the Ramsbottom Heritage News Magazine**

Contemporary evidence from their greatest critic, Peter Murray McDouall, strongly suggests that the GRANTS were unscrupulous employers who exploited their workers to an extent that was probably not unusual in the first half of the 19th Century, but which seems completely at odds with their reputation of benevolence. McDouall had used his access as a medical practitioner amongst the GRANTS' workforce in Ramsbottom and Nuttall to assemble a damning case against them. In 1838 he had delivered a paper to the Royal Statistical Society based on a survey of 309 cottages, alleging that they were operating a tied cottage system in Nuttall, where overcrowding was severe; and in 1842, he personally alleged in evidence to a parliamentary select committee that the GRANT Brothers were illegally practising a sophisticated version of the truck system<sup>1</sup> amongst their workforce.

**[Appendix follows]**

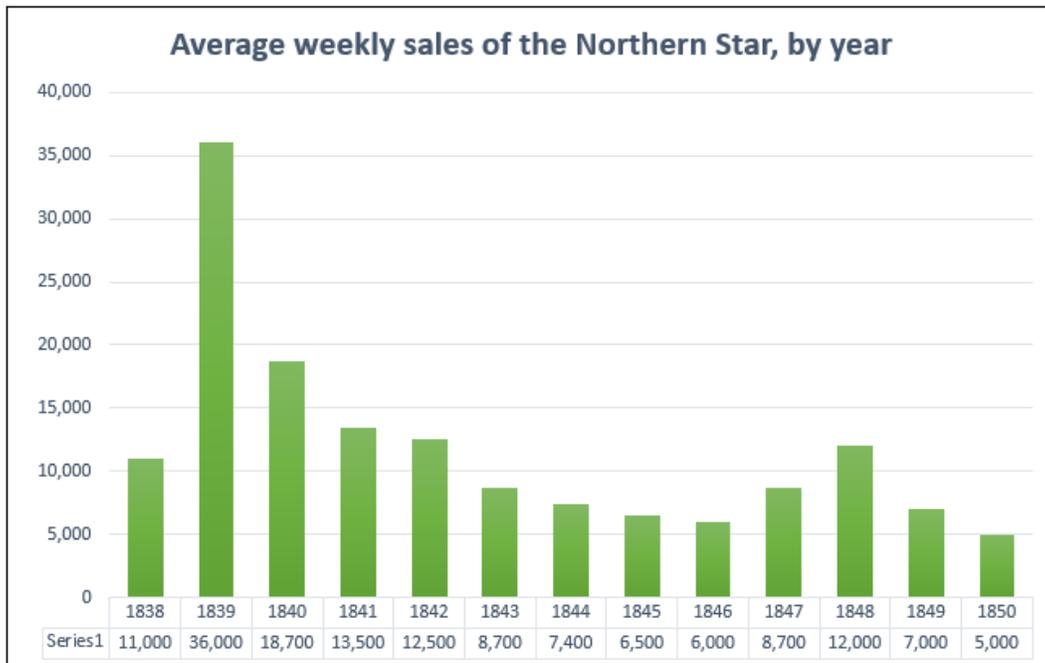
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<sup>1</sup> In 1840 British industry, the "truck system" involved employers paying wages in goods, tokens, or credit, rather than in conventional money, often at inflated prices and only redeemable at company-owned stores. This practice was driven by factors like limited access to liquid capital and a desire by some employers to reduce worker drunkenness. However, this system led to worker exploitation and was largely prohibited by the Truck Act of 1831, with its provisions extended to almost all manual workers by an Act in 1887. "Truck", in this context, is a relatively archaic English word meaning "exchange" or "barter".



It is odd to see the Chartists, one and all, proceeding quietly but surely to demolish the stronghold of corrupt Whiggism, and rampant Toryism. To see them unbroken, resolute, and persevering in their struggle for right, though every power has been opposed to them that wealth or rank could command, though their patriotic leaders have been torn from them and consigned to a gloomy dungeon. It is—no! it is *not*—odd to see Chartism gaining strength every day, and adding by degrees to its forces. This is not odd—because “Union is strength”—and “when the swan sinks, perseverance will fail.”

This chart reflects the rise and fall of the Chartist movement in the UK



## CHARTIST INTELLIGENCE.

### M'DOUALL AT HALIFAX.

This noble patriot made his public entry into Halifax on Saturday last. Owing to his unprecedented labours in the great cause of the Charter since his emancipation from the fangs of his Whig spoilers, the worthy Doctor had contracted a severe cold, and was otherwise so seriously indisposed, that great fears were entertained that even if he should be sufficiently well to make the public entry, yet that it would be impossible for him to address the men of Halifax on this occasion. On the appointed day, however, these fears were dissipated by his arrival at the Stump Cross Inn, Godley-lane, about a mile from the town, and in a very improved state of health, he having found it absolutely necessary to throw up several engagements, and lie by to recover his exhausted health and strength.

In the mean time the men of Halifax and the surrounding districts were making every arrangement to escort him into the town in a manner worthy of this distinguished champion of the Charter. Various bands of music, with banners, &c., paraded the town in the course of the afternoon, playing patriotic airs. They were accompanied by an immense number of friends; and at about five o'clock left the town for the Stump Cross Inn, where they met their distinguished visitor; and they shortly afterwards formed into procession, and returned towards the town in the following order:—

#### ORDER OF THE PROCESSION.

Two Marshalmen.

Splendid Banner: Inscription:

"The Charter: peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must."

Reverse: "Dr. M'Douall, the people's friend."

The Mixenden Band.

Operatives, six a-breast.

Southowram Banner—Inscription:

"Rise, Britons, from your slumber,

Be united, firm, and free;

The cause of your distress

Is the want of liberty!"

Operatives, six a-breast.

Midgley Flag—Inscription:

"Midgley Radical Association."

Reverse—"Equal rights and equal laws!"

Operatives, six a-breast.

Queenshead Band.

Queenshead Banner—Inscription:

"Queenshead Northern Union."

Reverse—"Equal rights and equal laws!"

Men of Queenshead, six a-breast.

Splendid Ripponden Banner:

On one side a painting of Adam and Eve at work, with the inscription:

"When Adam delved, and Eve span,  
Who was then the gentleman?"

An open carriage, drawn by greys, containing  
THE NOBLE PATRIOT, P. M. M'DOUALL,  
And Messrs. Haigh, Sreeton, and Wilkinson.  
Other Carriages.

In this order the procession moved towards the town, and covered the road on every point further than the eye could reach. The number who joined it must have amounted to many thousands. As the carriage passed through the deep cutting, over which passes the new Godley-lane Bridge, forming part of the old Bradford-road, the sight was animated in the extreme, the bridge and heights around being covered with dense masses of human beings, who testified their respect for the hero of the day by loud and repeated cheering, which the worthy Doctor returned in his usual affable and courteous manner. The procession then entered the town by Northgate, and passed along the Old Market, Market-street, Union-street, Westgate, Southgate, Corn Market, Main-street, Crown-street, Silver-street, Cow-green, and St. James's-road, to the Odd Fellows' Hall. Throughout its progress the whole population of Halifax appeared to be poured out into the streets; and its great length must have filled the heart of every patriot with joy, and of every enemy to the people with dismay.

On the carriage arriving at its destination, Dr. M'Douall descended from it amidst the cheers of the congregated thousands, and entered the Odd Fellows' Hall. It is a most magnificent building. The prin-

Dr. M'DOUALL was received with tremendous cheering, which was renewed again and again. He said he was proud to meet the men of Halifax upon that occasion; and happy to find that, buried as they were among their native mountains, they had heard the cry of liberty resound from the vallies, and had re-echoed it in a manner calculated to make their oppressors tremble. He was glad to see the men of Halifax re-establishing themselves in their old position—to see them once more bearing aloft the standard of the Charter, and once more planting it firmly upon their native hills; and he doubted not, when he reflected upon the mighty movement that had taken place throughout the north from Chester to York, that they would shortly carry that standard on to sure and certain victory, and to cause those principles to triumph for which he had suffered, and was ready to suffer again. (Loud cheers.) All the persecutions of all the governments upon the face of the earth could never trample down the truth—could never exterminate reason from the mind of man; and, though by their persecutions the Government had imprisoned a few Chartists, had they extinguished Chartism? They had that day said “No!” in a voice that could not be mistaken; and if they carried on their agitation with prudence, and energy, and determination, they must eventually obtain the victory. (Cheers.) It was easy enough for any tyrants upon earth to chain down the body of a man; but could they chain down his spirit—his intelligence—his mind? Could they take from him that power by which he saw through their injustice and estimated the injuries they heaped upon him? No! And consequently when they had placed him in a dungeon they had placed him in a Chartist college to study; and from which he had seen of his companions in that dungeon, and from what he knew of the men who had lately been

liberated, he could compare the Whig galls to nothing else than seminaries for the diffusion of Chartist knowledge. (Great cheers and laughter.) Imprisonment had neither changed his opinions or his determination to advocate them; and had only raised up in his mind a hatred and detestation of the iniquities of his Whig tyrants. If he had before been sincere in advocating the principles of the Charter, since he had left Chester Castle, he had come forward for something more than the Charter—the abolition of all the grievances of which the people complained; and in Chester College he had learnt that the Charter was but the stepping-stone to obtain their privileges, and as long as he had health and strength to demand those privileges, he would continue fearlessly to do so. (Loud cheers.) No inducement the Government could offer, and no reward they could give, would cause him to change that determination. They had offered him a reward; and he had asked, “Why send me to prison, and offer me a reward afterwards?” (Laughter.) The reward you must give me is the Charter; and when I get that I shall be of no party.” (Cheers.) Their worthy Chairman had stated that he was sorry that he, a working man, should have been called to the chair on this occasion; but he (Dr. M'Douall) should have been very sorry that any other than a working man should have been called to the chair. (Loud cheers.) If anything could add to the dignity of their cause it was that a working man was in the chair—if anything could add to the dignity of their cause it was that the movement had showed that the working men had braved the persecution of their masters—if anything could add to the dignity of their cause it was that they had even shut out of sight the destitution of their own families in order to obtain a large measure of justice, and had come forward in masses to show their oppressors that they possessed a power to take their rights if they were much longer refused; and the moment they showed, by perseverance and promptitude of action, that they possessed that power, that moment would their oppressors fear them; and it was but a short step from fear to obedience. (Cheers and laughter.) The Chairman had also said he was sorry to have taken the chair because the base hireling press would throw their mud and slanders at him (Dr. M'Douall) on that account. Now, if they looked back to the time when the agitation for the Charter first began, they would find they had no press in their favour; but they had shown the base press that they despised them, and they had put them down with a strong hand, and had established a press of their own. (Enthusiastic cheering.) Was

**GENERAL LETTER TO THE REQUISITIONISTS IN SCOTLAND, FOR A VISIT OF MESSRS. LOVETT, COLLINS, AND M'DOUALL.**

**FRIENDS AND BROTHER CHARTISTS!**—We rejoice in the patriotic spirit that our country has displayed on the present momentous occasion. It will show our dear friends in England who have suffered in the cause of liberty, that the evils they have sustained have allied them more closely to our affections; and it will tell our oppressors that persecution has only augmented our love of independence—has added force to our determination to be free.

You are all anxious to know the specific day on which Messrs. Lovett, Collins, and M'Douall will visit your respective districts, could we calculate minutely on every contingency—did we know every town they have to visit—the mode of conveyance from one place to another—how much labour or fatigue our noble-minded visitors could sustain—we could fix the exact day on which each demonstration would be held. But we do not know the minutiae of these things; consequently, we can only draw up a general route, and leave circumstances to regulate the detail.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NORTHERN STAR.

SIR,—I am requested to inform you that an adjourned meeting, to congratulate Dr. M'Douall on his release from Whig controul, was held at Johnson's lecture room, Clerkenwell Green, on Wednesday evening last. The meeting was well attended, and of a spirited nature. Mr. Cohen was in the chair. The following resolution was moved by myself—seconded by a gentleman in the meeting, and carried:—"That this meeting again congratulate Dr. M'Douall on the moral and physical victory he has gained over the Whigs." The next resolution was moved by Mr. Balls, and seconded by a gentleman in the meeting. It was unanimously carried. "That the meeting have heard with much gratification that is the intention of Dr. M'Douall to visit the Metropolis on his return from Scotland."

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES CULVERHOUSE.

10, Compton-street, Clerkenwell,  
11th September, 1840.

DR. M'DOUALL.—We are informed, from good authority, that this noble but persecuted patriot, during his visit to Bradford, distributed amongst the political widows the sum of £1, and, in justice to his generosity, we send it for insertion in the *Northern Star*.

MESSRS. COLLINS AND M'DOUALL.—A number of the friends of the above named patriots have held a meeting for the purpose of getting up a public dinner in honour of those noble-minded martyrs to the cause of the people. The Committee will meet on Monday night next, at eight o'clock, at the house of Mr. William Goldsborough, Bridge-street, to make arrangements, which, when completed, will be laid before the public through the medium of the *Northern Star*. The invitation will be forwarded to them on their return from Scotland. The co-operation of all true Chartists, for this most laudable purpose, is earnestly solicited.

**DR. M'DOUALL**

A Few Copies of the TRIAL of DR. M'DOUALL, Price Sixpence, still remain unsold, and as considerable anxiety is now manifested to obtain them, early Applications are necessary.

Abel Heywood, 60, Oldham-street, Manchester; J. Hobson, Star Office, Leeds; and all Booksellers and Vendors.

McDouall was also remembered by Victorians as the purveyor of "Dr. McDouall's Florida Medicine," the exact ingredients or purpose of which are unknown, but was part of the common trade in patent medicines during that era. He advertised it in the *Northern Star* in order to raise funds to support himself and his family.

