

1826 - 2026



THE 1826 LANCASHIRE WEAVERS UPRISING

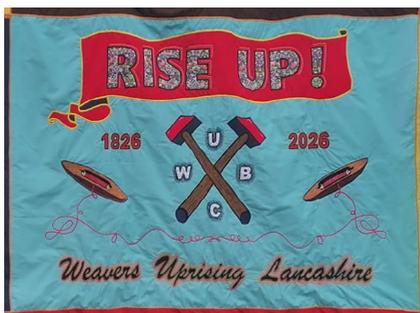
www.weavers-uprising.org.uk

WEAVERS UPRISING BICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION: REMEMBERING AND COMMEMORATING

Handloom weavers' in the nineteenth century were known to be a hard-working and compliant workforce who faced periodic poverty with stoical resilience. Yet in parts of Lancashire in April 1826 their patience clearly broke. Faced with a perfect storm of high food prices, low or no wages, the accumulative impact of poverty over

several years and the introduction of much cheaper forms of weaving through powerlooms in the factories, the handloom weavers' and other ordinary people felt they had no choice but to respond to the very real threat of mass starvation and related illnesses and premature deaths with rebellion.



This is an image of the original sketch of the 'Rise Up' banner by textile artist James Fox



This image is a photo of the protest coffin, banner and white remembrance crosses at the 197th Annual Commemorations at Chatterton in April 2023

The significance of the events of April 1826 have though been largely forgotten and so a new charity has been formed – **The Weavers Uprising Bicentennial Committee** – to work towards the remembrance of the context, happenings and aftermath of the Weavers Uprising and commemorate all those who died.

THE APRIL 1826 WEAVERS UPRISING

On the morning of the 24th of April 1826 thousands gathered at Whinney Hill, near Accrington, to devise a desperate plan of action in the face of starvation and threats to their way of life. Their mission was clear – to destroy all the powerlooms in east (Pennine) Lancashire without the unnecessary destruction of property or any violence to the person. During the uprising more than 1,100 powerlooms were destroyed by weavers' and their associates. From Whinney Hill as many as 10,000 people are believed to have joined the crowd as it headed west towards Oswaldtwistle and Blackburn.

On the following day, 25th of April 1826, around 2,000 protestors gathered in Earcroft, marched through Lower Darwin and Hoddlesden, then over the moors to Helmshore and eventually Haslingden. Their intent was a focused destruction of the powerlooms as a means of sending a political message about their extreme poverty,

On the third day of the uprising, the 26th of April 1826, the soldiers were ready for the protestors. That morning a crowd, estimated to be between 3,000-4,000 people, made their way from the adjacent towns of Haslingden and Rawtenstall along the sides of the south Pennine moors to Dearden Clough Mill in Edenfield and then down the steep hill towards the mill at Chatterton. When they arrived at Chatterton Old Lane, the local magistrate and the soldiers were waiting for them. Not long before 11am, the local magistrate William Grant, read a short extract from the 1714 Riot Act.

Shortly afterwards, under the orders of Colonel Kearney, 20 riflemen from the 60th Duke of York Own Rifles lined up in two ranks of 10 at the bottom of Chatterton Old Lane and opened fire. The soldiers fired 600 bullets into a crowd of 3,000 people over a period of 15 minutes. In the chaos that followed at least six people were shot dead: James Lord, John Ashworth, James Rothwell, Richard Lund, Mary Simpson, James Waddicar.

The indiscriminate killings by the soldiers can only be truly described as a massacre. Remarkably, following the shootings, the protestors regrouped and continued their quest to destroy further powerlooms.

The final day of the uprising, 27th of April 1826, started with just a couple of hundred people, but as the protestors made their way from Tockholes to Water Street Factory in Chorley, they were joined by a large crowd of bystanders.

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THE AFTERMATH

The response of the state to the uprising and food poverty in east Lancashire was punishment. This punitive mentality can be witnessed from the demands of the then Home Secretary, Sir Robert Peel, that none of the protestors should receive any of the charitable relief organised in London from May 1826, through to the harsh punishments received by protestors at the Lancaster Assize later in the year. Thomas Ashworth, who was one of the protestors in the uprising, died on the 26th of September 1826 from a 'visitation of God' (heart attack) after receiving the death penalty for his part in the uprising.

A total of 41 protestors received the death sentence and though 31 of those were later commuted to prison sentences, 10 people, who were part of the crowd during the uprising were transported to Australia.

Even worse, the mass deaths that the weavers' had feared and hoped to prevent, especially of children, were not avoided. Ongoing research has uncovered many hundreds of child deaths in the year following the uprising. The abject failure of the government to intervene means that these deaths can be understood as a form of social murder (when social conditions are such that they generate death, rather than life).



Members of the WUBC holding the James Fox 'Rise Up' banner at the 198th Annual Commemorations, Chatterton, April 2024

THE WEAVERS UPRISING BICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE

The Weavers Uprising Bicentennial Committee was officially launched during the inaugural Weavers Uprising remembrance walk by Dr David Gordon Scott at Whinney Hill, Accrington, on the morning of 24th April 2022. The inaugural walk covered approximately 45 miles over five days and broadly followed in the footsteps of the handloom weavers' of 1826. On 26th April a wreath was laid to commemorate the six people who died at Chatterton and those who died later of social murder.

The Weavers Uprising Bicentennial Committee aims to work for the public benefit in preparation for the 2026 bicentennial of the uprising. Our main objectives are to:

- Organise commemorative events, artwork, music, guided walks, remembrance walks, talks and other cultural events;
- Initiate new research and educational resources for local people (adults and children) about the uprising and its context;
- Create a sustainable legacy by securing funding for appropriate forms of remembrance.

The Weavers Uprising Bicentennial Committee involves many local volunteers who are currently actively working with local councils, museums, heritage sites, universities and other local groups to help generate interest for the 200th Anniversary commemorations throughout 2026.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE 1826 WEAVERS UPRISING

If you would like to know more about the uprising, the Chatterton massacre, and the wider context of societal conditions that led to these events, including why this tragedy has for so long been misinterpreted or forgotten, please do look at the Weavers Uprising Bicentennial Committee Website and look out for our forthcoming public events:

<https://www.weavers-uprising.org.uk/projects/>

The website provides further details about:

- The work of the WUBC and volunteer/supporter opportunities;
- Projects and online resources;
- Educational materials for adults;
- Details of the routes of the four day uprising;
- Details of the 2026 Bicentennial walks and gallery of pictures from previous walks;
- A contact form to get in touch with the WUBC.

The bicentennial commemorations of the 1826 Lancashire Weavers Uprising will take place throughout 2026 at several different sites, with the main commemorations on the weekend of **Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th April 2026.**

