



# **The Hammer of Defiance**



**a community play for Ashfield**

**by**

**Andy Barrett**

## Cast

Beth

John Godwin

Gravenor Henson

Benjamin Hancock

Elizabeth Hancock

Francis Betts

Ruth

Elsie, Elizabeth and Ruth's mother

Jeremiah Brandreth

Joseph Peck

Judge Bailey

Lord Byron

Prosecutor Reynolds

Sally Betts

The Joker

Prince Regent

Ned Ludd

Brynnny

Harry

Alice

George Spray

Judges

Duke of Newcastle

Charles Sutton

Joseph Falconbridge

John Hays – witness

Thomas Brunt – witness

Robert Caunt – witness

Betts Boy

Additional Luddites

**All accompanied by The Army of Redressers Band**

*As the audience take their seats The Army of Redressers play a medley leading into the first song that is sung by the cast; General Ludd's Triumph:*

Chant no more your old rhymes about bold Robin Hood,  
His feats I but little admire  
I will sing the Achievements of General Ludd  
Now the Hero of Nottinghamshire  
Brave Ludd was to measures of violence unused  
Till his sufferings became so severe  
That at last to defend his own Interest he rous'd  
And for the great fight did prepare

The guilty may fear, but no vengeance he aims  
At the honest man's life or Estate  
His wrath is entirely confined to wide frames  
And to those that old prices abate  
These Engines of mischief were sentenced to die  
By unanimous vote of the Trade  
And Ludd who can all opposition defy  
Was the grand Executioner made

He may censure great Ludd's disrespect for the Laws  
Who ne'er for a moment reflects  
That foul Imposition alone was the cause  
Which produced these unhappy effects  
Let the haughty no longer the humble oppress  
Then shall Ludd sheath his conquering Sword  
His grievances instantly meet with redress  
Then peace will be quickly restored

Let the wise and the great lend their aid and advice  
And ne'er their assistance withdraw  
Till full fashioned work at the old fashioned price  
Is established by Custom and Law

Then the Trade when this arduous contest is o'er  
Shall raise in full splendor it's head  
And colting and cutting and squaring no more  
Shall deprive honest workers of bread.



*Beth comes forward.*

**Beth:** All towns have a history. And all histories have connections with other histories. It's the way it is. A weave. And sometimes it is the turn of your town, the place where you live, where your children were born, where your parents were buried; to be placed at the centre of events. For the pattern of national concerns to be most clearly shown here, right here, in the centre of your town, at the end of your street, just outside your front door. And if you look into the history of where you live you will see that story. It may be hidden away in the street names; in the graveyards, underneath the paving slabs and in the lines of the distant trees. But it is there. And when it begins to get dark, if you squint your eyes and try and catch the stillness in those fleeting moments when it calls, then maybe you will see the story begin, just over two hundred years ago; in the autumn of eighteen hundred and eleven. The year of the comet.

*The cast all follow the sound of the comet and point up into the sky.*

**Beth:** A huge, bright sphere in the sky, visible for two hundred and sixty days, interpreted as an omen across the entire world; a harbinger of doom according to some. And here in England they may be right, for there is war with the American colonies and there is war with France; the harvests have failed; the winter is tough; and there is civil unrest, ever growing civil unrest, centred here in Nottinghamshire. And into this county arrives a man ...

*The cast depart as Beth continues. Smoke. The sound of horses. A boy – Harry – carrying cases and a reasonably well dressed man enter.*

**Beth:** John Godwin, a cousin of the political philosopher William Godwin, having only last night celebrated the fourteenth birthday of his niece Mary; who will one day go on to marry a poet, the close friend of Lord Byron, and dabble in writing herself, with a tale about a Dr Frankenstein and his monster. But that is a different story, not our story. This one is all about something else entirely.

**Godwin:** So this is Nottingham then?

**Harry:** It is sir.

**Godwin:** And what is it like?

**Harry:** Noisy sir. And dirty.

**Godwin:** And do you know any knitters?

**Harry:** All my family are knitters sir. Or were. I'm the only one that is working now.

**Godwin:** Well then; take this. *Godwin gives the boy a coin.* And if I need some more help will I be able to find you?

**Harry:** Yes sir. I'll make sure of that.

**Godwin:** Good boy.

*The boy leaves as Gravenor Henson arrives.*

**Henson:** Welcome to Nottingham John.

**Godwin:** Mr Henson.

**Henson:** Call me Gravenor please.

*They shake hands.*

**Godwin:** Thank you for letting me come to see what you are up to.

**Henson:** How can I refuse someone with your family connections? Can I ask who knows of your arrival here?

**Godwin:** William of course; one or two friends ...

**Henson:** And are they to be trusted?

**Godwin:** Yes.

**Henson:** Good.

**Godwin:** I do not understand.

**Henson:** They are watching us John. They think that by keeping a careful eye on our activities they may discover how the Luddites are organised; where they meet and how they plan their attacks.

**Godwin:** But surely the Committee is not part of ...

**Henson:** It is not. I promise you. But the government believes that anyone who is trying to better the lot of the knitters must be confederating in these attacks. And you being part of our cause will only lead to more suspicion.

**Godwin:** I was not aware that my presence here would cause you difficulty.

**Henson:** No; it is not, not at all. The more help we can get the better. And I'm honoured to have a Godwin working with us. There are very few men who understand the direction this country is travelling in. These are crucial times John. Times when sides must be taken. Either you are for humanity and social order or you are a disciple of Adam Smith and these damned free marketeers.

**Godwin:** I am afraid that I do not fully understand the rules of trade.

**Henson:** 'Tis not a thing to be understood, but a God to be revered. That is all you need to know of where they stand on the matter. Capital must flow unchecked and any who find themselves swept away in its path must find their own branch to hold on to, for none will be offered. You can write that down in your first letter to your cousin. I quite like it.





**Godwin:** I was not planning to write to my cousin sir.

**Henson:** Really? I presumed that was why you were here.

**Godwin:** You see things with a very clear eye.

**Henson:** A necessary ability when faced with such continual obstruction. But it is good John. That you are here; that you will write. This is a battle that needs to be documented. They have their scribes working on their history books and we need ours. Now let me help you with these. Come on; before some paid lackey of the state creeps up upon us.

*Henson and Godwin leave. Musical underscoring begins by The Army of Redressers.*

**Beth:** He has come to the county, under the request of his cousin William, to work for the Framework Knitters Committee, set up to press for government legislation to deal with the grievances of those employed in this trade. And right now they have many. For the knitters are going hungry. And this part of the world is where the knitters knit. Nottingham, Mansfield, Sutton, Hucknall. And Kirkby.





*Benjamin, Elizabeth Hancock and a child come onto the stage and begin working; Benjamin on the machine, Elizabeth seaming stockings; the child winding the yarn from the hanks to the bobbins.*

**Beth:** A typical weavers' cottage. A typical weavers' family. The father on the frame rented from the master hosier; the mother seaming the stockings; the children winding the yarn from the hanks to the bobbins. Sixteen hours a day. *She puts on a hat to become the Bagman.* And in the morning the Bagman will arrive to collect and pay for the work....

**Bagman:** The price has fallen again.

**Hancock:** But why?

**Bagman:** 'Tis what people will pay; it cannot be helped.

**Elizabeth:** But we have hardly enough to cover the rent for the frame, the candles and the oil, let alone food.

**Bagman:** I cannot help the price of bread.

*Benjamin hand over the goods; the Bagman hands over some money before reaching into his bag and handing over some cloth and buttons.*

**Hancock:** And what is this?

**Bagman:** The cloth and buttons are worth the same as you are due; maybe more.

**Elizabeth:** We don't want cloth and buttons.

**Bagman:** The pawnbroker will be happy to take them.

**Elizabeth:** The pawnbroker will not give us what they are worth.

**Bagman:** Then find another hosier to work for.

*Beth takes off the hat as the family go back to work.*

**Beth:** They call it the truck system. It happens a lot around here.

*Henson appears from the balcony.*

**Henson:** From the flatness of trade which has existed about two years, many schemes are adopted by the little makers to get their work produced at a lower cost. In some instances by paying less for the labour, in others reducing the quality, and lastly by paying about two-thirds in goods, which is almost universally the case in Sutton. Look at the practices of hosiers such as Mr Francis Betts.



*Betts now appears on the balcony, across from Henson.*

**Betts:** The owner not only of frames that are rented out across Sutton, but of a workshop too, in Smedley's End.

**Henson:** Operating wide frames; with unskilled labourers producing shoddy goods. Bits of material that are stitched together rather than properly knitted work.

**Betts:** If people don't want them they don't have to buy them.



**Henson:** But having so reduced the price of their goods by your practices you have compelled the principal manufacturers to either discharge their workmen or reduce the price in some measure to enable them to meet you in a fair competition in the market, otherwise they will be undersold.

**Betts:** We are an emerging class Mr Henson and are breaking no law. It is always the small businessman that drives things forward. We must do whatever we can to make a profit. It is our duty. Surely you understand that?

**Elizabeth:** Men like Betts are destroying the trade and everyone that works in it.

**Beth:** Elizabeth Hancock. Wife of Benjamin Hancock.

*The child on stage exits.*

**Beth:** Who have no children. (*The cry of a baby*) At least not one that can work. Yet.

**Hancock:** (*Exiting*) Let me go to the pawnbroker and see what I can get.

**Beth:** This cottage is in Hucknall, like Sutton and Kirkby a place where framework knitting is as dominant an industry as mining will become a century later.

*Ruth enters.*

**Elizabeth:** What are you doing here?

*Ruth pulls a rabbit from underneath her coat.*

**Elizabeth:** Has Jeremiah been poaching again?

**Ruth:** No; he was given it by Mr Betts, as a bonus for all of his hard work this week.

**Elizabeth:** You must tell him to stop being so foolhardy. He will swing for it one day.

**Ruth:** Since when has anybody been able to tell Jeremiah anything? How is the child?

**Elizabeth:** She screams all night long. Benjamin cannot stand it.

**Ruth:** And how is he? How are you both?

**Elizabeth:** We are exhausted.

**Ruth:** Everyone is exhausted.

**Elizabeth:** But it is worse than ever Ruth.

**Ruth:** I hope he is still carrying out his matrimonial duties.

**Elizabeth:** Stop it.

**Ruth:** What else is there to enjoy?

**Elizabeth:** And when are you to marry?

**Ruth:** 'Twil not be long.

**Elizabeth:** You have been saying that for months.

**Ruth:** Why bother if it comes at such a price? Jeremiah is never too tired for that.

**Elizabeth:** Then maybe you should send him over.

**Ruth:** Maybe I should.

*They laugh.*

**Elizabeth:** Benjamin has been seeing more of him than usual.

**Ruth:** There is a great deal to be discussed.

**Elizabeth:** What are you talking about?

**Ruth:** Come on Elizabeth. You've heard what's happening in Nottingham. How the men there are standing up to the hosiers.

**Elizabeth:** And what good will come of that Ruth? The militia will not stand for it. They'll shoot every one and hang those who don't die from their wounds.

**Ruth:** It's quicker than dying of hunger.

**Elizabeth:** And who will look after the children?

**Ruth:** At least they will grow up knowing that their fathers fought for something.

**Elizabeth:** That is Jeremiah talking. Not you. Be careful; a firebrand such as he may very easily set everyone around him up in flames.

**Ruth:** For God's sake woman 'tis gone beyond the point where men and their families can sit around and do nothing.

**Elizabeth:** There are those who are working for a change in the law.

**Ruth:** The law! The law is not for the likes of us! The law is a thing that has been made so that we must do whatever they demand of us at whatever rate they desire to pay. The law is there to make sure that if we dare to complain that they will break our bodies and throw us to the dogs.

**Elizabeth:** Listen to you. You've always been the same. Had your head and your tongue turned by every boy and man you've ever met.

**Ruth:** And where do you think Benjamin is?

**Elizabeth:** He's gone to the pawnbrokers to see what we can get for the cloth and buttons the bagman gave us.

**Ruth:** And you are sure of that?

**Elizabeth:** What do you mean?

**Ruth:** Just open your eyes Elizabeth to what is happening around you? Buttons! How dare they? And yet who will stop them? Who will stop your baby crying all night long because her tiny stomach is in agony? Who will stop your husband being so exhausted that he cannot even be a proper man to you?

*Elizabeth slaps Ruth.*



**Elizabeth:** I'm sorry. Forgive me. But if the authorities even hear that the men are meeting there will be trouble. And the little work we do have will be taken from us. *Brandishing the rabbit*. And then we will need more than this to keep us all alive.

**Ruth:** But for how long must we keep relying on rabbits that carry a death sentence with them?

**Elizabeth:** Do you really think they will have any qualms of doing whatever it takes to quell a few rebellious knitters?



**Ruth:** It's not a few Elizabeth. Not if all can be persuaded to do what needs to be done. I must go. Take care.

*Ruth goes to leave; as she is about to exit Elizabeth calls out:*

**Elizabeth:** But how many men do you need Ruth, to change such a face as the one that England has set to the world?

**Beth:** And what a face it is. This England of 1811. A face that you need to see, to understand this story.

*The Joker arrives through the audience accompanied by four assistants. There is a shambolic, anarchic edge to this that offers a strong stylistic break with the more naturalistic style of much of the performance. This whole section is accompanied by The Army of Redressers.*



**Beth:** There are those that say that messages were passed from town to town by travelling players who performed in secret in the cellars and stables of taverns; performances which were meant to provoke the audience, to steel the heart, to bolster the cause.

**Joker:** What a load of old codswallop.

**Andy B:** Balderdash ...

**Wendy:** Poppycock ...

**Brian:** Piffle ...

**Joker:** Now get out of the way woman! It's my turn! (*Indicates to the band, who strike up a tune*). Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, postmen and plumbers and those who work in the ever expanding industry of the pound shop, may we present a gallery of the most glorious ...

**Wendy:** Most magnificent ...

**Brian:** Most resplendent ...

**Andy B:** Men ...

**Joker:** ... that the world has ever seen. Those that rule over us; that care for us; that make this country what it is today. Starting with the most dazzling of them all.

*The tune has become a recognisable version (only just) of The National Anthem.*

**Joker:** King George the Third!

*All stand to attention and wait. They look at each other. Where is he?*

**Andy B:** He's not here.

**Joker:** Why not?

**Marilyn:** Because he's mad ...

**Wendy:** Addled ...

**Brian:** Dribbling like a loon ...

**All:** Three blackbirds short of a pie!

*Boom! Boom! The music changes instantly to a mournful tune. One of the troupe comes forward and weeps; huge amounts of water dripping from their handkerchief.*

**Joker:** But do not weep my friends; no do not. For who needs a King when we have such a moral giant to stand in his shoes? Look; here he comes.

*Music as a waddling George IV with an outrageous costume walks down the aisle, the troupe run up to him to hand him food and spray perfume as he farts continuously ...*

**Regent:** Brittainia! Your Prince is here and the Regency is upon us! And what a time we shall have! Viands ...

**Joker:** Viands?

**Regent:** Viands! Endless parties! Champagne! Dandies prancing and preening! And preening and prancing! And all to the sound of the waltz!



*A waltz is played and all dance. A voice calls out from the balcony:*

**Jo:** But what about the cost?

*Everything stops. All turn to this upstart.*

**Regent:** What did you say?

**Jo:** Nothing.

**Marilyn:** Yes he did.

**Andy B:** He mentioned the cost.

**Jo:** No I didn't.

**Brian:** Yes he did; I heard him.

**Regent:** Then chop his head off and stuff him in a pie! Oooh me gout. And look at the state of my varicose veins! Get me more viands! Whatever they are! And my Dukes! I want to see my Dukes!

*The music changes to The Grand Old Duke of York as The Duke of Newcastle now comes down the aisle, carrying a ridiculous looking gun ...*

**Joker:** You asked for a Duke and we've got one. The most Dukish Duke of them all. Henry Pelham-Clinton ...

**Duke:** I like my names double barrelled; like my guns ...

*He fires the gun into the air. Feathers are thrown off of the balcony into the audience.*

**Joker:** The Duke of Newcastle!

**Duke:** We have seen what happens over in France ...

**All:** Boo!



**Duke:** When radical notions are allowed to take root; and the lower classes get ideas above their station. Insubordination!

**All:** Boo!

**Duke:** Which leads to revolution!

**All:** Boo!

**Duke:** And then before you know it the King goes and gets his head cut off!

*Chloe comes on with a platter and the Kings head is revealed!*

**Duke:** We must quash any such notions that may begin to appear. We must tighten the screw. Where are the judges! Where is the bloody code!



*More music as the Judges (who will play Reynolds and Bailey) now walk up the aisle.*

**Joker:** The case!



**Digby:** Stealing a sheep.

**James:** Stealing a belt.

**Jo:** Stealing an apple.

**Judges:** Hang them!

*Nooses are unfurled from the balcony.*

**Judges:** Hang them all!

**Joker:** Ah England! How proud the world must be; of this church going and venerable land. Withdraw! Depart! Exeunt!

*All now exit with the music continuing as they depart. As they do so Hancock and Brandreth appear carrying a huge pile of almanacs.*

**Hancock:** What will you do with all of these?

**Brandreth:** Sell them to raise money.

**Hancock:** I thought there were enough who were contributing to the cause.

**Brandreth:** But it is illegal to beg or to raise money by subscription. A simple exchange is all that is necessary to make sure they cannot catch us on that one. And everyone needs an almanac.

**Hancock:** Let us hope the printer does not miss them.

**Brandreth:** He will know where they have gone.

**Hancock:** And may go to the magistrates.

**Brandreth:** No Benjamin. He won't. Like the farmers who have been persuaded to contribute to protect their stacks.



**Hancock:** And you have no qualms over this?

**Brandreth:** How else are we going to support ourselves?

**Hancock:** But 'tis not just that.

**Brandreth:** No. And 'tis time you joined the cause too. You are the cleverest one amongst us; the knitters know and trust you; I have never been popular.

**Hancock:** You have got into too many fights.

**Brandreth:** And you none at all.

**Hancock:** I have never had cause to.

**Brandreth:** Wouldn't you like to face down Betts and all those like him? Don't you think the time has come for a reckoning?

**Hancock:** I have made a promise to Elizabeth.

**Brandreth:** There will be a meeting soon and many men are to come; from Kirkby, from Hucknall and Sutton. You will be welcomed Benjamin, you know that. Many would be glad to see you there.

**Hancock:** When is it?

**Brandreth:** You will be told.

*The two men exit as we see John Godwin sitting at a desk and writing a letter which we see on the screen accompanied with images. This is a voiceover.*

**Godwin:** Dear cousin; my job is to collect samples of different work for the Committee's campaign; warp net, cotton stocking made of single cotton, light silk hose, stiff silk hose; the list is endless. All to be sent to parliament so that the skill and workmanship of these men and their families can be properly witnessed. Every day I am sent to another town or village to gather what I can; and the poverty and desperation that I am thrust into is more terrible than even you may imagine. Wages are lower now than a hundred years ago. The use of colts, unskilled apprentices, is growing day by day; and the wide frame machines are being used to make what the men call cut ups; work that is stitched together rather than being properly knitted, with the result that it falls apart at the seams, something that is bound to ruin the reputation of the industry and will bring down the knitters and the hosiers alike. And yet nothing is being done to alleviate the situation, and the men grow more desperate by the day. This, as you said, is a county ready to ignite.

*The letter on the screen begins to burn as Alice, a young servant girl enters.*

**Alice:** There's a coach outside waiting for you sir.

**Godwin:** Thank you Alice. And will you do me a favour and post this for me please.

**Alice:** You write a lot of letters sir.

**Godwin:** There is a lot to say. And what do you think? Of these men who smash the frames of those who pay a lower wage?

**Alice:** I think they are right to do so sir. And that General Ludd is as much a hero of Nottinghamshire as Robin Hood.

**Godwin:** And what do you think he looks like?

**Alice:** Fierce sir; with eyes like a sparrow hawk and a scar this long on his cheek from the Prince Regent's sword.

**Godwin:** Well one day we may find out.

**Alice:** I hope so sir.

**Godwin:** I hope so too Alice. Though I fear he may not look quite as dashing as you suppose.

*Alice and Godwin exit and the lights come up on the Hancock's cottage, as Benjamin and Elizabeth work. Music to underscore the scene change.*

**Elizabeth:** They say that they are calling up soldiers to man the streets in Nottingham. And that rewards are being offered for anyone who has knowledge of the framebreakers.

**Hancock:** And yet still nobody knows who these men are. Nobody will talk Elizabeth; everyone knows that the authorities mean none of us any good.

**Elizabeth:** There will always be someone who puts money above loyalty.

*Elsie, Elizabeths mother, enters.*



**Elsie:** What's for dinner? I'm starving.

**Elizabeth:** They let you out then?

**Elsie:** They all got bored of throwing things at me.

**Hancock:** What was she in for this time?

**Elsie:** Throwing a turnip at the vicar. Got him smack on his big fat veiny nose. Arsey varsey he went, into a great big pile of horse sh...

**Elizabeth:** Do you always have to talk this way mother?

**Elsie:** Would you rather I spoke like them? All high and mighty? And then the moment when folk really want God's help the vicar tells us that we should all do just as we're told, pray for the kingdom of heaven, and starve to death.

**Hancock:** She's right Elizabeth.

**Elsie:** I'm always right.

**Elizabeth:** And what's that you've got in your hand?

**Elsie:** Some young lad is selling them. I gave him the last penny I had. Told him I would have given him more as well, if he had something better to offer.

**Elizabeth:** Let me look.

**Hancock:** It's a broadside. Raising money for the cause.



**Elizabeth:** It breaks your heart to read this.

**Elsie:** It's not hearts that need breaking.

**Elizabeth:** Not you as well.



**Elsie:** When I was your age knitters were respected across the land. Skilled men; artisans; working hard but getting paid a fair wage. Now look at it. They say half the population of Nottingham is on the poor rate.

*There is a knock at the door. Benjamin exits.*

**Elsie:** So are you going to feed me something or what?

**Elizabeth:** We haven't got anything.

**Elsie:** No wonder there was such a scramble for that turnip.

*Benjamin and Godwin enter.*

**Elizabeth:** Who is this?

**Hancock:** Mr Godwin; sent from Nottingham to gather samples for the parliamentary cause.

**Elizabeth:** You see; there are people fighting for us. I am pleased to meet you Mr Godwin.

**Godwin:** You too madam.

**Elsie:** She's no madam.

*Ruth enters.*

**Elsie:** And neither is she.

**Ruth:** Though I could be if I was shown how.

**Hancock:** I'll fetch the work.

*Benjamin exits.*

**Ruth:** And who are you then?

**Elizabeth:** Mr Godwin.

**Godwin:** John. I'm collecting samples on behalf of the Framework Knitters Committee to take to parliament. It is vital that they understand the skill that the knitters possess.

**Elsie:** Those that serve a proper apprenticeship.

**Godwin:** The more evidence we can gather the stronger our case.

**Ruth:** Your case?

**Elizabeth:** He is working on our behalf. And we should thank him for his efforts.

**Ruth:** So it is what we knit that will make them change their minds?

**Godwin:** This is an established and important trade.



**Ruth:** Trade! Trade! Take the baby instead. Or better still invite those that make the law to come here and listen to her screaming all night long because her belly is empty.

**Godwin:** I understand that the situation is hard ...

**Ruth:** Do you?

**Elizabeth:** Leave him alone; he is doing no wrong.

**Godwin:** And I know why you may be suspicious of any attempt to alleviate your situation through an act of parliament.

**Ruth:** Nothing will come of it.

**Elizabeth:** It may.

**Ruth:** And what do you think of these so called Luddites Mr Godwin? I hear that Nottingham is full of them.

**Godwin:** All the more reason for us to move as swiftly as we can. I understand their anger but it is only the law that will protect the knitters from the vagaries of the market.

**Elsie:** Don't mention that word 'market' in here! The more I hear it being said the worse things seem to be.

*Benjamin enters with the samples.*

**Hancock:** Here Mr Godwin. I hope they are of use.

**Godwin:** How much do I owe you?

**Hancock:** I will not take money for those.

**Godwin:** But you have worked to make them.

**Hancock:** And now they are to serve a purpose that will be of benefit.

**Elizabeth:** Benjamin, we cannot afford ...

**Hancock:** We would receive pennies for this; I will not take money from a cause that is trying to help us.

**Godwin:** It is only fair that I pay you ...

**Elizabeth:** You see Benjamin, Mr Godwin understands that ...

**Hancock:** It is a gift. I will hear no more of it ...

**Elizabeth:** Benjamin ...

**Hancock:** No more!

**Godwin:** Well then, I thank you for your favour and hope that one day I will be able to repay it. Now if you will excuse me I must go to collect some more work from another knitter here.

**Ruth:** I will walk with you.

**Elizabeth:** I'm sure he's capable of walking on his own.

**Ruth:** I would like to hear more of his opinions. If that is alright with you ... John.

**Godwin:** I would be honoured.

**Elsie:** And if you fancy walking past the bakers Mr Godwin, I'm sure Ruth would let you buy something for us all.

*Ruth and Godwin begin to walk up the aisle ...*

**Ruth:** So you are from London?

**Godwin:** I am.

**Ruth:** I have always dreamed of going there one day. Although I suppose I never will.

**Godwin:** There is much here to be content with, surely; even if it is a struggle to make a living ...

*... as we see another letter being written on the screen ...*



**Godwin:** And this woman, Ruth she was called although I will not mention her surname in case these letters are apprehended, talked to me about her life and showed me the homes of others in the trade and told me how there was another committee, right here where she lived, different from the one I work for, but which has its own rules and systems, and plans of action; though when I asked her exactly what she meant she told me she had said too much already, that I must swear to keep my peace on the matter.

*We now move into a recording as The Army of Redressers begin to underscore The Miseries of the Framework Knitters and the cast re-appear.*

**Godwin:** And I told her of your work, and that I would come back and bring her a copy of your book, and she said that she would like that very much. And that evening as I left in my coach, and saw men leaving their houses with their heads down and their hands in their pockets with a hurried step, as though full of intent; I wondered that if I was in their position whether I too would be ready to take action, whether I too would be ready to join with my brothers in defence of my livelihood, whatever the risk.



**All:** Ye kind-hearted souls, pray attend to our song,  
And hear this true story which shall not be long;  
Framework knitters of Sutton, how ill they are used,  
And by the bag-masters how sorely abused.

Derry down, down, down derry down  
Derry down, down, down derry down



They've bated the wages so low for our work  
That to gain half maintenance we slave like a Turk;  
When we ask for our money comes paper and string,  
Dear beef and bad mutton or some suchlike thing.

Derry down, down, down derry down  
Derry down, down, down derry down

Bad weights and bad measures are frequently used--  
Oppressive extortion--thus sorely abused;  
Insulted and robbed, too--we mention no names--  
But pluck up our spirits and bowl in their frames.

Derry down, down, down derry down  
Derry down, down, down derry down





*Beth once again puts on the hat of the Bagman. Benjamin enters and another exchange of goods is done silently, but it is obvious, from the silent argument, that the price is even lower than before. The Bagman exits as we hear the baby's crying fade up. Elsie enters and hands the broadside to Benjamin and leaves. Benjamin reads the broadside silently as Elsie sings:*

**Elsie:** Good people, oh pity our terrible case,  
Pray take no offence though we visit this place;  
We crave your assistance and pray for our foes,  
Oh may they find mercy when this life we lose.

**All:** Derry down, down, down derry down  
Derry down, down, down derry down



*Brandreth enters with a group of young men – as many as possible but at least nine: Carnell, Green, Peck, Marshall, Poley, Clarke, Fell, Falconbridge, Spray. The broadsheet that Benjamin has been reading now becomes a copy of the Luddite oath (this can be shown on the screen). Brandreth claps Benjamin on the shoulder and nods.*

**Hancock:** I ... Benjamin Hancock of my own voluntary will, do declare and solemnly swear that I will never reveal to any person under the canopy of heaven the names of those who compose the secret committee, their proceedings, meetings, places of abode, dress, features, connections, or anything else that may lead to the discovery of the same either by word, or deed, or sign ...

*And now everyone in the play joins in:*

**All:** ... under the penalty of being sent out of the world by the first brother who shall meet me, and my name and character blotted out of existence and never to be remembered but with contempt and abhorrence; and I further now do swear that I will use my best endeavour to punish by death any traitor or traitors, should any rise up amongst us, wherever I can find him or them; and though he should fly to the verge of nature I will pursue him with increasing vengeance; so help me God and help me keep this my oath inviolable.



*As this ends the men come up to Hancock and shake his hand. They exit, talking to each other as they do so; congratulating Benjamin on taking the oath. ('You're a good man Benjamin' / 'There's more of us by the day' / 'Betts and hosiers like him won't know what's hit them' etc.)*

*Meanwhile Henson enters with a bottle of wine and comes across to a small table at which Godwin is sitting.*

**Henson:** Here. To celebrate.

**Godwin:** To celebrate what?

**Henson:** You have no more need to go gallivanting around the county. We have enough samples John. More than enough. Your work has been invaluable; and when parliament comes to its senses the knitters and their families will have you as much as any to thank.

**Godwin:** I am simply an errand boy.

**Henson:** You are much more than that. Here.

**Godwin:** What is this?

**Henson:** A ticket to Dublin. We leave in three days. Then on to London and to Birmingham. A national unity man; that's what we need. Not each area looking after itself. Look at how the other trades combine – the tailors, the shoemakers, the bookbinders, the gold beaters. None of these receive less than thirty shillings a week. The carpenters cannot believe we keep no regular fund to support ourselves. There is twenty thousand pounds in theirs. They see us as fellows wanting in spirit as our pockets are of money.

**Godwin:** And you are certain that there will be a bill put before the House?

**Henson:** All of the debates in the newspapers suggest such a thing needs to be brought forward.

**Godwin:** There are many that oppose it. That wish to see the trade carry on in this manner. If only they had to live for one week like those they rely on. Maybe they would start to shout the name of Ned Ludd too.

**Henson:** But these framebreakers do not help their own cause. Parliamentary democracy is the only way forward.

**Godwin:** You do understand why the knitters have resorted to this action?

**Henson:** Of course I understand man! How long can dissatisfaction smoulder in the breast before chaos is unleashed? My whole purpose is to fight poverty. I can see how it grinds all into desperation but there is too much anger. And once passion becomes the controlling voice of any movement then it is ... dangerous.

**Godwin:** It is a tactic Gravenor. It is well organised. It is not just an angry mob.

**Henson:** And the authorities will do whatever they can to crush those who are a part of it. And then portray everyone who fights for their cause, in whatever way, as a revolutionary.

**Godwin:** So we must oppose those who fight for the same thing?

**Henson:** We must try and do the best we can so that those who come after us can rest a little knowing that the most elemental argument has been resolved.

**Godwin:** And what is that?

**Henson:** That trade must be the slave to human society, not human society the slave to trade.

**Godwin:** You are a good man Gravenor.

**Henson:** And so are you John; so are you.

*The two men drink as Beth comes forward.*

**Beth:** The place name Sutton is a common one that simply means a south farmstead or village; from the Old English words suth, meaning south, and tun meaning farmstead. And there are two other Suttons in this story; one on each side. The editor Charles Sutton of the Nottingham

Review, unafraid to tell the truth of what is happening, and to publish letters in support not only of Henson's cause but of the frame breakers too ...

*Sutton now climbs into the pulpit.*

**Sutton:** Whilst the parties are at strife, and during the ferment which these tumultuous proceedings have occasioned, it is not the time for dispassionate reflection. Manufacturers and workmen, magistrates and people, have all their different feelings, according to the circumstances in which they stand; nor ought the opinion of any one of these to be taken as the standard of truth. When the ferment shall have subsided, will be the time to re-consider these disputes; and then, we presume, our statements will be deemed more impartial than some people at the present imagine; and in general they will be found to have been essentially correct.



**Beth:** And another Charles Sutton, with some added manners; Charles Manners Sutton, a man from a distinguished Nottinghamshire family who happens to be, at this very moment, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Though he of course, as a man of the established God in an area where the Methodists are multiplying, is not so willing to look at all sides of the argument.



*And now the Joker appears in the pulpit, the Archbishops mitre being put onto her.*

**Joker:** I am much alarmed at these Luddites, and fear they will produce a commotion if they are not speedily put down.

**Elsie:** Who's got a turnip I can throw at the fool!

**Beth:** This is a divided country; watched over on one side by this man and his cronies ...

*The Prince Regent appears again.*



**Regent:** Surely you've all had enough of these awful lower class types from up north. Where is Nottinghamshire anyway?

**Beth:** And on the other side, by a man as mythical as Robin Hood himself ...

*The Army of Redressers play as a very large Ned Ludd puppet is carried through the church.*





**Regent:** By Jove he's enormous! Why can't we get to the bottom of this! Who is he? What shall we do? What shall we do!

*As the puppet moves through the church accompanied by The Army of Redressers we hear a recorded declamation.*

**Ludd:** We do hereby declare to all hosiers, lace manufacturers and proprietors of frames that we will break and destroy all manner of frames whatsoever that make spurious articles and all frames that do not pay the regular prices heretofore agreed to by the masters and workmen. We further discharge that any person who has been employed by me, and is found out in giving any information of breaking frames to the Town Clerk so as to hurt the cause of Ned or any of his Army, will be punished with death.

*A copy of the royal proclamation is shown on the screen, followed by other notices as mentioned:*

**Joker:**        (*ringing a bell*) Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye! A royal proclamation has been issued offering a fifty pound reward for the apprehension of any offender connected with the Luddite outages.

**Regent:**        Has it worked?

**All:**            No!

**Marilyn:**      Set up a Watch and Ward in Nottingham!

**Wendy:**        Recruit more spies!

**Marilyn:**      Establish a curfew!

**Wendy:**        Paste the whole county in notices!

**Regent:**        Has it worked? Has it worked? Has it worked?

**All:**            No! No! No!

**Marilyn:**      Foreign agency is strongly suspected to be supporting and directing the whole business your Highness.

**Wendy:**        There are said to be four companies or gangs, one for each of the districts of Nottingham, Swanwick, Arnold and Sutton in Ashfield.

**Joker:**        They have captains, lieutenants, secret signals and meeting places. But nobody knows who they are or where they meet.

*As the Joker exits we see Ruth and Godwin in The White Swan.*

**Godwin:**      Hello.

**Ruth:**         John. Collecting in Sutton now are we?

**Godwin:** No; my work is done here. I have come to give you this. (*He hands over a book*).

**Ruth:** Thank you. (*She looks at it for a moment or two*) What does it say?

**Godwin:** (*embarrassed*). I am sorry; I never considered ...

**Ruth:** You think me clever enough for books and that is enough. Jeremiah has taught himself to read, he will tell me what it says.

**Godwin:** It is called Political Justice. It is about how society may one day be.

**Ruth:** But only if you fight for it.

**Godwin:** Yes. (*Handing over a purse*) Here. You must give this to your sister too; for the samples.

**Ruth:** They are not worth that much.

**Godwin:** They can use the money better than I.

**Ruth:** I will try. But Benjamin is a proud man.

**Godwin:** There is nothing wrong with that.

**Ruth:** We are all proud; in Hucknall and here in Sutton. Proud of what we are; knitters. And we will not let them destroy us, destroy what we are.

**Godwin:** Be careful though. They are afraid, of that I am sure, and will do whatever it takes to protect everything that they have.

**Ruth:** Then so must we.

**Godwin:** The campaign will be successful Ruth. If only the committee you talk of would give us a little more time.

**Ruth:** Is that why you are here? To try and stop them doing what they must?

**Godwin:** No. But if all of this could be resolved in other ways then ...

**Ruth:** It is too late.

**Godwin:** What do you mean?

**Ruth:** It is time to take example from our brothers in Nottingham.

**Godwin:** Where?

**Ruth:** In the town that exhibits the greatest injustices.

**Godwin:** Here? In Sutton.

**Ruth:** (*realising she has said too much*) You must go now John. Thank you for this. I will see that my sister gets it.

**Godwin:** But I was hoping ...

**Ruth:** Please. And take care.

*Godwin exits; Ruth looks into the purse, smiles and exits also.*

**Beth:** No-one knows how the Luddites were organised. No-one knows how decisions were taken. But whatever form it took, one thing we do know ...

*The Luddites enter.*

**All:** Aye!

**Beth:** That the men of Hucknall, of Kirkby and of Sutton made a decision that they were ready to march under General Ludd's flag.



*From the balcony we see Elizabeth call out:*

**Elizabeth:** Benjamin I beg of you.

**Hancock:** It is planned now. You must talk no more. To anyone.

**Elizabeth:** But you know how Jeremiah is. He will go too far; he always does.

**Brandreth:** Men! 'Tis time for the oppressed to take furious revenge on their oppressors. 'Tis time for us to show the world that we will not be ground into desperation but will rise, as one, to push aside a life of perpetual barrenness and blast and claim the dignity that is due all who walk on this Earth.

**Peck:** Where are we to gather?

**Brandreth:** The muster is in Arnold. An alehouse there; ‘The Hut’. A local militia Sergeant called Jackson has come over to our side and will be handing out gunpowder to those with firearms.

**Hancock:** Why do we need those?

**Brandreth:** To protect ourselves.

**Falconbridge:**But we have none to carry with us Jeremiah.

**Brandreth:** Then we will gather them as we march to Sutton. Once we reach the seventh milestone on the road between Nottingham and Mansfield, then we will join with others there.

**Falconbridge:**I thought we were meant to strike in secret. Surely hundreds of men marching along a road in broad daylight isn’t such a thing?

**Hancock:** Don’t worry Joseph. The Militia do not know anything about it and will have no reason to be on that road ...





**Brandreth:** Unless we have a spy in our midst.

**Hancock:** We will arrive there early evening; the sun will almost be down then. And after the attack it will be dark, and we can all slip away and get back to our homes safely.

**Brandreth:** Leaving Betts and all those like him knowing that it is we that decide the relationship between master and worker.

*A cheer goes up as the men exit and The Army of Redressers begin to play 'Red Lemonade'.*

**Beth:** And so, on the afternoon of that day, the 13<sup>th</sup> November 1811 ...

**Joker:** ... the Prince Regent played dice and drank port at Carlton House ...

### *Tableaux*

**Beth:** The Duke of Newcastle went hunting at Clumber Park ...



**Beth:** Prime Minister Spencer Perceval was dealing with problems in Ireland and an economic recession.



**Beth:** Judge Bailey sat in his garden and read an account of a namesake of his, an Arthur Bailey executed at Ilchester for stealing a letter from the Post Office at Bath.

*Tableaux*

**Beth:** King George III was bound in a straitjacket and chained to a chair.

*Tableaux*

**Beth:** James Alexander Stevens, a wine merchant of Mansfield, and a member of the Yeomanry, was wondering whether it was the great comet that had somehow made the weather perfect for wine making.

*Tableaux*

**Beth:** And hosier Francis Betts unlocked his workshop and looked out over his frames, his wide frames, knowing that however hard things were for most, he was still able to turn a fine profit.

*Betts appears on stage. There is a barrage of drumming. We hear Brandreth shout out:*

**Brandreth:** Blacken your faces! Do not speak any names! And let us pour down hell on those who oppress us! Sutton shall rise!

**Beth:** Wait! Wait! Not yet! The trial is where we will hear of the attack.

**Joker:** Then where will you tell the story from now?

**Beth:** From here. Look!

*The sound of gunfire and horses. Cries of 'Run men! Run!' as all of the men disperse except for Brandreth and Peck, and two others, Joseph Falconbridge and a wounded George Spray, who will enter soon. Ruth appears.*



**Ruth:** Quick come in; and wash your faces. There are troops everywhere.

**Brandreth:** Oh we gave them such a seeing to Ruth.

**Falconbridge:** Every wide frame in Sutton is left in ruins.

**Peck:** And some narrow ones too. They were not meant to be broken.

**Brandreth:** You sound like Benjamin.

**Ruth:** Where is he?

**Brandreth:** I do not know. The yeomanry came through on their horses and we had to scatter. He will be safe.

**Peck:** They attacked my uncle's shop. He only has a handful of frames. This was meant to be about Betts.

**Ruth:** Your uncle has chosen which side he wants to be on.

**Peck:** No Ruth, no. I wish I was out. I'll never go with the luds no more.

**Brandreth:** Be careful what you say.

**Peck:** Or what Jeremiah?

*Spray enters. He is bleeding.*

**Peck:** George!

**Brandreth:** Did they see you come in here?

**Spray:** No! God man! Look at me! Will I live?

**Ruth:** Let me see to it.



**Peck:** What happened?

**Spray:** Soldiers bringing some Frenchies through.

**Ruth:** Did you see Benjamin?

**Spray:** They took him.

**Ruth:** Are you sure?

**Spray:** I didn't see it; but Joseph Slack told me they've taken Checker.

*Ruth does not understand.*

**Brandreth:** That's what we call him. We don't use names. But appellations and numbers.



**Peck:** No good if you're caught though is it?

**Spray:** They took George Green too.

**Ruth:** Green was with you?

**Spray:** Yes.

**Ruth:** I thought he was the Parish clerk.

**Brandreth:** He is.

**Peck:** They'll come for us all now. Knocking on every door in the town. Wanting to know if we live here or no.

**Ruth:** Then wash your face, creep out the back door, and get to where you're meant to be going.

**Peck:** Where am I to go again?

**Brandreth:** Collinses.

**Peck:** I'd rather head back to Hucknall.

**Brandreth:** No! You know the plan. No-one on the road tonight. They'll have the troops out. Nobody in Sutton has seen or heard anything. If the Militia haven't taken you yet then you'll have nothing to worry about.

**Peck:** There were dozens who were with us because they were told to, and were too scared not to take part. Young boys some of them. They'll round up those that they can see are frightened and we'll all end up in front of the Judge.

**Brandreth:** They've all taken the oath.



**Peck:** Oh words man; words!

**Brandreth:** Be quiet!

*Brandreth and Peck carry on washing their faces in silence as Beth continues:*

**Beth:** Benjamin had been taken, along with several others, including William Fell, William Bellamy, and young Robert Poley. Joseph Peck was picked up on the way back to Hucknall. George Spray was apprehended later. It was Ruth that went to see Elizabeth that night.

*Ruth now meets Elizabeth on a bridge.*



**Elizabeth:** I told you this would happen.

**Ruth:** There were dragoons coming through with French prisoners. They weren't expected.

**Elizabeth:** And Jeremiah?

**Ruth:** He is in hiding.

**Elizabeth:** Oh of course; no harm will come to him. 'Twill be the others that he has dragged in that must pay. Them and their families.

**Ruth:** There is already talk of breaking the men from gaol. Another meeting has been ...

**Elizabeth:** Stop it! Stop it with your nonsense and your head full of rammel. My husband has gone now and I may never be with him again. You may think that you have won a victory by depriving a hosier of his frames; but if the cost of that is to deprive a child of her father then I cannot understand how you should do anything other than hang your head in shame. I will never forgive you Ruth.

**Ruth:** Elizabeth ...

**Elizabeth:** Never! Now go. And do not come back here again. Don't worry; I will keep my silence. You do not need to send anyone to threaten me.

*The screen lights up again and we see Godwin writing. This is performed live.*

**Godwin:** I returned to find the county in uproar once again; not just the attack but all that has followed, just as Gravenor had said it would. The riot act being read as a thousand souls attended the funeral of a frame breaker killed in Arnold. The proprietor of a Mansfield Inn who had provided the Yeomanry with horses on the night of the attack, awaking to find twenty tons of hay going up in smoke. A call for the military to be placed in every parish, whilst Lords and Earls throw hundreds of pounds at a subscription in the vain hope of suppressing these wildfire rebellions. And of course, this most dreadful bill that is to be put towards the house, whilst ours still waits to be heard. And in the midst of all of this, cousin, I had a most unexpected visitor.

*Byron enters.*

**Byron:** John Godwin? (*Godwin turns round from the desk*). Your door was open. Please excuse me. Lord Byron. I was passing through and thought that I would pay you a visit. If it is convenient.

**Godwin:** Yes ... yes of course ... it is an honour. Would you like a drink?

**Byron:** Thank you.

*Godwin pours two glasses of claret.*

**Byron:** I find your cousin's work most interesting.

**Godwin:** I will tell him.



**Byron:** There are not enough voices that raise themselves in opposition to the tenor of our times.

**Godwin:** It can be dangerous to do so.

**Byron:** And are you a radical like he?

**Godwin:** I am here merely to serve Mr Henson in his efforts to alleviate the condition of the framework knitters through the laws of the land.

**Byron:** I have traversed the seat of war in the Peninsula, I have been in some of the most oppressed provinces of Turkey, but never under the most despotic of infidel governments did I behold such squalid wretchedness as I have seen since my return in the very heart of Christian country.

**Godwin:** And yet when a proposal is made to emancipate or relieve, they hesitate ...

**Byron:** But a death-bill must be passed off hand, without a thought of the consequences.

**Godwin:** Yes.

**Byron:** I have never seen so many meagre with famine, sullen with despair, and careless of a life which the Lordships are about to value at something less than the price of a stocking-frame.

**Godwin:** Will you be in Nottingham long?

**Byron:** Tonight only. Then I must leave this violent county behind. London is awash with pickpockets and criminals but never have I seen such chaos.

**Godwin:** Nottingham has become an armed camp. Nine hundred cavalry and one thousand infantry have been billeted, and yet they are still impotent against the actions of General Ludd's army.

**Byron:** And do they really think that this bill is the remedy for a starving and desperate populace? Will the famished wretch who has braved their bayonets, be appalled by their gibbets? And how will they carry the Bill into effect? Can they commit a whole county to their own prisons?

**Godwin:** It is an act of panic.

**Byron:** Perhaps they will proceed by decimation. Place the county under martial law. Depopulate and lay waste all around them and restore Sherwood Forest to its former condition of a royal chase and an asylum for outlaws.

**Godwin:** Will any stand up in the Lords to declare that there are surely capital punishments sufficient in their statutes? That there is blood enough upon their penal code?

**Byron:** I am due to give my maiden speech in a matter of days. I was hoping for some encouragement in the matter.

**Godwin:** Then you have it. And all working men will thank you for it. 'Twill be as great a thing as your poetry.

**Byron:** And what should I say Godwin?

**Godwin:** All of those things you have told me. And more.

**Byron:** Is that all the wine you have?

**Godwin:** Yes.

**Byron:** Then let us get some more. (*Handing him a purse*) Here. As much as you can.

**Godwin:** Harry!

*Harry returns*

**Byron:** It will be a late night for both of us.

*The lights fade on this as a voice calls out 'Lord Byron!' and the cast all shout 'Hear! Hear!'*



**Byron:** My Lords; the subject now submitted for the first time, though new to the House, is by no means new to the Country. But whilst these outrages must be admitted to exist to an alarming extent, it cannot be denied that they have arisen from circumstances of the most unparalleled distress. The perseverance of these miserable men in their proceedings, tends to prove that nothing but absolute want could have driven a large and once honest and industrious body of the people into the commission of excesses so hazardous to themselves, their families, and the community. At the time to which I allude, the town and county were burdened with large detachments of the military; the police was in motion, the magistrates assembled, yet all these movements, civil and military had led to - nothing.

**Godwin:** *(now back at his desk, the letter on the screen continuing)* And yet not a soul listened to a word that he said. All of his work, of our work, was to no avail. And great though his speech was, I wish now that he had just berated them with his poetry.

*Byron now launches into a poem, forcing his way through the ensuing heckling.*

**Byron:** The rascals, perhaps, may betake them to robbing,  
The dogs to be sure have got nothing to eat



So if we can hang them for breaking a bobbin,  
It will save all the Government's money and meat:  
Men are more easily made than machinery—  
Stockings fetch better prices than lives—  
Gibbets on Sherwood will heighten the scenery,  
Showing how Commerce, how Liberty thrives!

**Beth:** And in the middle of this tumult, the date of the assizes were announced; the trial of the Ashfield men, the first to be charged under the new law.

*Lights up on Elizabeth and Elsie.*

**Elsie:** Come on Elizabeth; Mr Godwin has sent a coach for us both. We must set off for Nottingham.

**Elizabeth:** They say there will be hundreds there to watch what will happen.

**Elsie:** And out of all of them it is you that Benjamin will want to see.

**Elizabeth:** They have troops guarding the prison; arms and ammunition are being taken to the Shire Hall.

**Elsie:** Some action will be taken but Ruth has promised that there is to be no attempt to free the men.

**Elizabeth:** Still playing these games.

**Elsie:** They are doing what they can. And somebody has to. What has become of this world? Ever since the commissioners arrived with their plans and their staves and stole and parcelled up all the common land things have not been right.

**Elizabeth:** And now my husband will be made an example of. He will swing; you know it; they will all swing.

**Elsie:** Maybe they will be lucky and get a merciful Judge.

**Elizabeth:** There is no mercy in England mother. It has been outlawed. And I do not think that I shall ever see it in my lifetime again.

*Elizabeth and Elsie leave as Beth comes forward.*

**Beth:** And so the case. The real case. (*Images on the screen of the trial documents*) These are the documents of the trial. Of the five men that were to face the Judge at the spring assizes at the Shire Hall in Nottingham. Gervas Marshall, Robert Poley, George Green, Joseph Peck, and Benjamin Hancock. There were others whose case was put forward to the next assizes, including George Spray whose injuries had delayed his case. Look at the flourish of the writing. Imagine the scrivener sat at the side of the court, dipping his quill into his ink and setting forth the details of what happened to these men. This is how we piece together what happened. From the testimonies of the witnesses that stood in Nottingham ...



*The jury assemble.*

**Beth:** All stand for Judge Bailey. I said all stand for Judge Bailey!

*The audience stands as Bailey enters.*

**Bailey:** Gentlemen, it is not for me to inquire, whether the persons who have thus involved themselves in trouble, have any just cause for complaint, because if grievances do really exist, the proper and indeed the only way to get them redressed is to apply to the Legislature of the country. But this should likewise be particularly remembered, that while the complainants continue in a state of open violation to the law, even the Legislature will not attend to their prayers. And to add to their sufferings, partly brought about by their own misconduct, the law will be too strong for them – many of them will fall victims to their own daring folly; for the law must and shall be obeyed. Is the jury sworn in?

**Brynnny:** Yes sir.

**Bailey:** Then let us begin. Be seated.

**Brynnny:** If I may sir.

**Bailey:** If you may what?

**Brynnny:** I have received something sir. A letter. From General Ludd.

**Bailey:** Then perhaps you would read it out for us all to hear; if you are able. Are you?

**Brynnny:** Yes sir. (*He hesitates, unwilling to proceed*)

**Bailey:** Well go on then man; what's the matter with you? Afraid that the General is with us? Come on!

**Brynnny:** 'Remember the time is fast approaching when men of your stamp will be brought to repentance; you may be called upon soon. Remember - you are a marked man. Yours for General Ludd. A True man'.

**Joker:** He's here; amongst us; watching everything. Watching each and every one of you on the jury!

**Bailey:** Silence in court! Let us begin with the first prisoner.

**Beth:** Call forth Benjamin Hancock!

*Benjamin Hancock enters*

**Bailey:** Mr Reynolds. You have the stand.

*Reynolds, the prosecutor, stands*



**Beth:** And so it began.

**Reynolds:** My first witness your honour.

**Beth:** Call John Hays!

*A boy of 16 comes forward. On the screen we see 'John Hays. 16 years; late a framework knitter but now employed in a cotton mill'.*

**Reynolds:** And you were with the mob when they gathered?

**Hays:** That's right sir. More men than I could count sir. Carrying swords, and axes and hammers. And he was there sir. Checker Hancock. Right at the front, telling the men what to do, him and this other one who isn't here today.

**Reynolds:** And it was definitely this man that you saw?

**Hays:** Oh yes sir. In a light coloured coat and a white hat he was. And holding a gun.

**Elizabeth:** No! It's all lies!

**Bailey:** Quiet!

**Beth:** Somebody has to be the ringleader.

*A swift and dramatic change in the lighting state. Hancock stays where he is, calling out from the dock; whilst Brandreth is elsewhere in the room, holding a gun.*

**Hancock:** No!

**Brandreth:** We've got to get the men organised Benjamin. And we need more weapons.

**Hancock:** There's plenty enough to break frames with.

**Brandreth:** But what if we are met by a regiment?

**Hancock:** Then we will have to turn back.

**Brandreth:** There is no turning back now Benjamin. Look, we have an army. And we need to let them know that we will fight. Fire another round men and then reload your pieces!

**Hancock:** You will have the men shoot themselves Jeremiah!

*Brandreth fires the gun.*

**Hancock:** Calm down man! Just calm down. We need to make sure that the best gun men, the best hatchet men and the best hammer men are in the front of the line.

**Brandreth:** You see Benjamin; you're a born captain! Glory will be yours.



*Swift lighting change. The screen now shows 'Thomas Brunt of Kirkby, apprentice Blacksmith' as another young man is in the dock*

**Reynolds:** So the mob had reached Kirkby and now sought more weapons. Is that right?

**Brunt:** There were some of them sir that came to my father's house ...

*Lighting state changes ...*



**Brandreth:** *(To a member of the audience)* Give us your firearms now, damn you. We have greater need than you ever will. Come on man! Or else I will take it and shoot you too.

**Hancock:** It will be alright. You need not be afraid of lending it to us. And I promise you that what I have taken I will return.

*Lighting state changes ...*

**Reynolds:** And was it?

**Brunt:** Yes, sir. Around nine o'clock, He said it has been well used. And that his name was Hancock and he did not care who knew it.

**Reynolds:** But by then the damage had been done. Call forth Sally Betts.

**Beth:** Call Sally Betts!



*Sally Betts takes to the stand, as there is much conversation amongst the audience. The screen shows her name.*

**Reynolds:** You are the wife of the hosier Francis Betts.

**Sally:** I am.

**Reynolds:** And how did events proceed on that terrible day?

**Sally:** Well it was between three or four o'clock, when a boy came up to my husband.

*Lighting state changes ...*

**Boy:** Mr Betts! Mr Betts! The mob are coming! They're coming here sir! They're going to break everything in their path!

*Lighting state changes ...*

**Sally:** Francis came straight to the shop to order the men to give over working; and told me to get the goods out as fast as I could.

**Reynolds:** And did you?

**Sally:** I started to, but I could see them, the mob, about two hundred yards away, thirteen or fourteen abreast, so many of them with their faces all blackened, in lines with guns and hammers and I ran back in, bolted the door and went through into the house, locking that door as well. I didn't know where my husband was, so I went next door to ask, and when I got back he was there, in front of the house, with four men I'd never seen before.

*Lighting state changes ...*

**Brandreth:** Are you willing to give up your wide frames and have them broken?

**Betts:** I am not.

**Brandreth:** We will break yours and every wide frame in Sutton before we leave. Do you intend to fire on us? (*Betts does not answer*) Because if you do we will pull your house and mill down and destroy every wide frame in the county. We are two thousand brave men and if anybody offers to hinder us we will blow the town up.

*Lighting state changes ...*

**Sally:** And then all hell broke loose. One of them immediately levelled his gun and fired at the shop door ...

*Lighting state changes as another shot is heard...*

**Brandreth:** Where's the hammer men!



**Hancock:** Come on! Quickly! Break down the door!

**Sally:** Stop it!

**Hancock:** Leave us. We are only here for the wide frames.

**Betts:** You have no right ...

**Brandreth:** And what makes you think I have any care of what you consider right or wrong. Perhaps my pistol does not have any such worries either.

**Hancock:** Forget him Jeremiah. *(To Betts)* And get away man.

*Lighting state changes ...*

**Reynolds:** And you both left?

**Sally:** We did. And heard them, hammering at the door, a terrible noise, and they broke it down alright, and started at the windows

*Lighting state changes. The sound of breaking glass and wood.*

**Hancock:** Roll up Ned Ludd's family! Let's show them what we mean. Out the windows with them. Let's see them broken in bits like our families have been.

**Brandreth:** Take the hammers to everything you find men! Let's show those who doubt us that we are ready to smash them and all their ill works into atoms.

**Hancock:** I swear that I will fiercely shoot any of the men who break the narrow frames.

**Brandreth:** Let's have no opposition amongst ourselves.

**Hancock:** It is about the wide frames. If all are broken then surely we become nothing but an unruly mob.

**Brandreth:** Damn your eyes! Smash away!

*Lighting state changes ...*

*Another witness. The screen shows Robert Caunt of Hucknall Torkard; Framework Knitter.*

**Reynolds:** And you were part of the mob?

**Caunt:** They made me go sir. They said that if I didn't that I would have to watch my back; and that when I was left with no work it would be my own fault and the committee would not give me a penny and would not care if I starved.

**Joker:** Liar! Judas!

**Bailey:** Quiet!

**Caunt:** Please sir my mother is ill sir; I did not mean any harm. I was with them but I didn't go near the frames that fell from the sky.

**Reynolds:** And how long were they there?

**Caunt:** About two hours sir. It was bedlam sir. Men running with their hands full. Food and furniture and all sorts.

**Reynolds:** Looting.

**Caunt:** Yes sir. And then some of them went to the store room of Mr Betts, at Sutton Woodhouse ...

**Reynolds:** ... where they entered and broke and damaged therein eight frames also the property of Mr Betts, before continuing to run amok.

*Lighting state changes ...*

**Brandreth:** Come on men; there are one hundred frames in this town and we will break every one. There is no one to stop us and after today the whole of England will know that Ned Ludd's word is law. Come on Benjamin.

**Hancock:** We have done what we set out to do.

**Brandreth:** Come on man!



*Lighting state changes ...*

**Reynolds:** Destroying frames in the houses of Edward Jennings, of Richard Tailor, of George Hadden ... and would have continued if it were not for ...

*Lighting state changes ...*

**Hancock:** Soldiers!

**Brandreth:** Where?

**Hancock:** 'Tis the Mansfield yeomanry.

**Brandreth:** Get ready men! The war has come to us and we will not flinch.



**Hancock:** Don't be foolhardy. 'Tis time for us to leave. Brothers! Go to those places where we agreed and you will you be safe. The day is done. We will meet again when the dust has settled.

*Lighting state changes ...*

**Reynolds:** Twenty eight frames and forty two machines in all. To the value of over four hundred pounds. Rooms full of broken machines and implements; frames in pieces that had been thrown onto the street. Like a pack of wild animals.

**Bailey:** Thank you Mr Reynolds.

**Beth:** That was the case against Benjamin Hancock. There were those who stood up and testified that he was a man of good character ...

**Elsie:** A hard working son in law.

**Elizabeth:** A caring father.

**Godwin:** A conscientious and generous man.

**Beth:** And then Bailey addressed the jury.

**Bailey:** I must assure you that character ought not, in the smallest degree, to sway you in your consideration. This crime, which merits a like punishment to those most terrible, is equally dangerous to the well-being of society, yet it bears no proportion to them, in moral guilt. Frame breaking is not a breach of the Ten Commandments, though it breaks down the barriers of peace and felicity, and as such, must be punished with the utmost rigour of the law. You may retire to pass your verdict.



*As the jury exit The Army of Redressers sing Welcome, Ned Ludd (A lyric - This paper was posted up in Nottingham on Saturday Morning on May 9th 1812). The jury enter again at its conclusion. Hancock is handcuffed by The Joker during this.*

Welcome Ned Ludd, your case is good,  
Make Perceval your aim;  
For by this Bill, 'tis understood  
It's death to break a Frame.

With dexterous skill, the Hosier's kill  
For they are quite as bad;  
And die you must, by the late Bill-  
Upon my bonny lad!

You might as well be hung for death  
As breaking a machine  
So now my Lad, your sword unsheath

And make it sharp and keen

We are ready now your cause to join  
Whenever you may call;  
So make foul blood run clear & fine  
Of Tyrants great and small!



**Bailey:** How do you find the defendant?

**Brynnny:** Guilty your honour.

**Betts:** Prepare to swing man! Prepare to swing!

**Bailey:** Then I must pass sentence. The crime for which you have been found guilty is one that requires the most firm punishment.

**Brandreth:** No General but Ludd means the poor any good!

**Bailey:** It appears that you were the ringleader of this particular outrage.

**Elizabeth:** That is not so. Without him there it would have been worse.

**Bailey:** And my sentence must reflect that. The prisoner, Benjamin Hancock, being found guilty of the charge of feloniously wilfully and maliciously breaking and destroying the frames of Francis Betts shall be transported to his Majesty's dominions beyond the seas for a period of fourteen years.

**Betts:** But the law man! The law! Are you a hanging Judge or no!

**Bailey:** I will run these assizes as I see fit. Next!

**Joker:** Call forth Joseph Peck!

**Beth:** Four more men were tried. Peck receiving the same sentence as Hancock; Marshall, Green and Poley being transported for seven years. The assizes left town at the same time as the stall holders of the March Fair.

*Everyone departs; leaving Elizabeth and Benjamin. They embrace. Godwin enters.*

**Hancock:** John.

**Godwin:** There has been a petition sent to the Prince Regent. Four thousand have signed it.

**Hancock:** If they had signed it in the blood of their children it would make no difference.

**Elizabeth:** Where is Van Diemen's land?

**Godwin:** It is to the south of the Australian continent.

**Hancock:** Further than Bulwell then.

**Godwin:** Yes.

**Hancock:** I have asked you here for a favour John; and a promise.

**Godwin:** Anything Benjamin.

**Hancock:** First you must promise me that your bill will be successful. We have been spared the noose today but there will be plenty more that will not.

**Godwin:** I promise. And the favour that I am due to repay you?

**Hancock:** To look after my family as best you can. I do not know if Jeremiah is capable; his head is so full of rebellious notions.

**Elizabeth:** But what can John do for us?

**Hancock:** I will be honoured to assist you, whenever you may need me.

*The Joker enters as a gaoler.*

**Joker:** Come on! Your time is up.

**Godwin:** Let me out and give them a moment together.

**Joker:** I am only opening this door once.

**Godwin:** For God sake man; where is your humanity?

**Joker:** Humanity costs in a place like this.

*Godwin reaches for his pocket, but Elizabeth interrupts him ...*

**Elizabeth:** John. I have something for you. Ruth gave it me by mistake ... (*she takes out the purse that Godwin gave to Ruth. Godwin waves this away but she insists*) I must not go against my husband's wishes.

*Godwin nods, takes the purse, hands it to the gaoler and leaves. Elizabeth and Benjamin embrace as we see the other men projected on the screen.*

*The Army of Redressers play 'Reverie' as the sailing section begins.*

**Beth:** The men were taken from the gaol at five in the morning; their coach being surrounded by an escort of Hussars. They arrived in Newgate prison and were soon delivered to the prison hulks at Woolwich, their home for several weeks; before climbing aboard the *Indefatigable* with two hundred other convicts, and beginning their journey, of several thousand miles and many months to Van Diemen's Land, never to return. And John Godwin threw himself into his work like never before; with a little help from a knitter's son.



*On the screen we now see a map of a boat crossing the seas. Godwin is at his desk with Harry, the young servant boy we saw with him as this arrival, coming and going carrying large piles of books.*



**Godwin:** June 16<sup>th</sup>. The bill was read a first time last night after 12 o'clock, when we had all left the house, conceiving it would not be read from the lateness of the hour. Lord Castlereagh is of the opinion that regulations should take place in our trade.

**Godwin:** June 30<sup>th</sup>. Lord Sidmouth has asked Henson if he can have some silk hose for his daughters and says that the Prince Regent will wear their ornamented stockings. Therefore my lads, Gravenor says, there's no opposition in the Lords.

**Godwin:** July 13<sup>th</sup>. Tomorrow Henson is to parliament as we hope the bill will gain its assent. I have bought a bottle of the finest champagne to celebrate with.

*During this last statement Harry has left the space, returning when it is completed:*

**Harry:** There is a Mr Henson to see you sir.

**Godwin:** (*Handing over a coin*) Excellent. Here; your help has been invaluable.

**Harry:** And have we done sir?

**Godwin:** Yes boy.

*Henson enters.*

**Harry:** And I can tell my family that all will be well?

**Godwin:** (*picking up the bottle of champagne*) Leave us. Go on!

*Harry runs off.*

**Godwin:** Well?

**Henson:** A victory ... for Dr Adam Smith's disciples.

**Godwin:** What?

**Henson:** The bill is lost John. On the grounds that trade should be left alone. To do what it will. That it stands above all else; above morality, above security ...

**Godwin:** Above love ...

**Henson:** Yes.

**Godwin:** All this work for nothing.

**Henson:** Do not say that. We will find a way to present it again. Another approach. We must gather everyone together; try and calm the temper of the County.

**Godwin:** Why should we Gravenor? If they will not listen to reason then why should they not feel the full force of the people's anger? Excuse me; but I must go to see someone.

**Henson:** Can't it wait? I thought we could at least eat together.

**Godwin:** I am sorry. I have no appetite. (*Shouting as he exits*) Harry! Come back! Can you find me a coach that will take me to Hucknall?

*Henson picks up one of Godwin's many books, shakes his head, falls back in a chair and puts his head in his hands.*

*Godwin is now with Elizabeth. The frame is being taken away.*

**Godwin:** I have failed you.

**Elizabeth:** You did what you could. And now you should go back to London. Find a good woman, marry her, have a family of your own.

**Godwin:** I am not a young man.

**Elizabeth:** There is always time.

**Godwin:** Maybe you and your daughter can come with me. I can arrange lodgings, do what Benjamin has asked of me.

**Elizabeth:** No. The committee have seen to it that we are provided for. She sleeps much better now.

**Godwin:** And your sister?

**Elizabeth:** I do not know if I can forgive her.

**Godwin:** Benjamin made his own decision.

*Elizabeth nods; knowing that Godwin is right.*

**Elizabeth:** They say that wives may be allowed to go and join their husbands in the new world.



**Godwin:** It is a terrible journey Elizabeth. Many do not make it alive.

**Elizabeth:** There is nothing for me here. There is very little for anyone. Ruth was right wasn't she? Those with money and power care nothing of sucking the soul from a town like ours.

**Godwin:** Yes.

**Elizabeth:** I'm glad that Benjamin stood up and fought. I'm glad.

**Godwin:** Goodbye Elizabeth. And good luck.

*They embrace and Godwin leaves, up through the aisle. Elizabeth begins to pack as Ruth appears.*

**Ruth:** John.

**Godwin:** Ruth. I am sorry ...

**Ruth:** You have nothing to be sorry for.

**Godwin:** I always believed that reason would prevail; but everything that you said is so.

**Ruth:** Have you heard this week's cry? 'Give us work at any price; half a loaf is better than no bread!'

**Godwin:** Yes. I had a boy helping me. I went to see his parents; to thank them for his work.

**Ruth:** What kind of world is it when we accept anything, as long as we can breathe? There is so much more to experience John; and we must fight hard if we are ever going to even begin to know what it is to truly live on this earth. I have started to learn how to read. The book you gave me. 'Man is of all other beings the most formidable enemy to man'.

**Godwin:** It will not always be this way.

**Ruth:** No. It will not.

**Godwin:** I am leaving.

**Ruth:** I know. It was good meeting you John.

**Godwin:** Maybe one day we will ...

**Ruth:** No.

*Godwin nods his head and exits as Ruth looks up to see Elizabeth packing. She moves towards Elizabeth, hesitates and then moves away again.*

**Beth:** And John went back to London; to Shoreditch. And married, as Elizabeth told him to, and had a child, named Elizabeth; who, as it turns out, is my great great great grandmother. Which is why I am here, telling you this tale. In 1814 Elizabeth and her daughter arrived in Hobart. And within a year she and Benjamin had another child; one of eight more that Elizabeth was to give birth to. Benjamin got a job as a sawyer. He was also appointed a Constable for the District of Hobart Town.

*The performers enter onto the stage as Beth continues:*

**Beth:** And during that time the frame breaking continued in Nottinghamshire, and spread to other counties too; Yorkshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire. Over twenty men were hanged; Prime Minister Spencer Perceval was assassinated; Gravenor Henson built the knitters into a successful trade union, before three of the committee's members were sentenced to hard labour and the union collapsed; and Jeremiah Brandreth, more hot headed than ever, joined the Pentrich Revolution, marching to Nottingham to attack a local barracks, before moving on to overthrow the government and end poverty for ever. And was hanged for his involvement. And then beheaded.

Benjamin was granted a conditional pardon and given fifty acres of land in the District of Norfolk Plains going on to become an innkeeper. In 1840 he and Elizabeth and the children moved to Melbourne, where he became the licensee of three more inns, the last being the 'Punt' where both he and Elizabeth died; she on the 3rd December 1851; he on the 7th June 1853, aged sixty five years old.



Ten years later this county was transformed with the discovery of coal, and those families who had once supported themselves through framework knitting now became miners. And the towns of Hucknall and Kirkby and Sutton thrived like never before. Until once again the disciples of Adam Smith unleashed their fury and the people here fell prey to the same attacks that Hancock and the men of that time had fought against.

*And now we can see images of the rise and fall of Ashfield, accompanied by images of strikes and protest as everyone sings the last song. On top of these images is superimposed a list of all of the men who took part in the Sutton attack.\**

I ply my trade upon the loom and on the stocking frame  
Until the factory came along, a happy was my game  
The work was hard but in the yard I propagate some harvest  
But now I'm poor I've got no more, the winter is the hardest



Weft a way warp a way  
We're not prepared to hide  
Burn the factory to the ground  
Then we'll turn the tide

They say there's some that face the noose and others transportation  
But that's the price we're having to pay in this despondent nation  
To Australia I am bound, and without trepidation  
To tell the tale of General Ludd and spread his reputation

Weft a way warp a way  
We're not prepared to hide  
Burn the factory to the ground  
Then we'll turn the tide

And if to England I return when I am old and weary  
I'll raise a glass to General Ludd, who I shall still love dearly  
And when I'm dead and in my grave, my struggles they be over  
I'll sing his name 'een from the grave, from Kirkby down to Dover

**Elizabeth:** So next time you hear of the Luddites, and of how they stood in the way of progress, remember that this is not the case; this is not the case at all.

**Hancock:** That they fought for and not against something.

**Elizabeth:** For a country in which family and charity and love and comradeship must come above all else.

**Beth:** Thank you for coming. Take care.

**All:** Weft a way warp a way  
We're not prepared to hide  
Burn the factory to the ground  
Then we'll turn the tide



## Fin

\*Joseph Butler, George Rhodes, Joseph Brackney, Joseph Buck, Joseph Kettledon, Benjamin Hancock, Henry Richards, Joseph Hutchison, William Fell, Matthew Limb, Mr Low, 'Jannock' or 'Johnnock', Mr Legg, John Hayes, Master Henson (a boy), Mr Clarke, Gervas Marshall, William Greaves, Joseph Hooks, George Clarke, Thomas Shipley, Thomas Webster, John Clarke, William or John Leather aka 'Ned Ludd', Thomas Day, George Spray, William Shorter, Joseph White, John Brinnington, Luke Rhodes, Robert aka 'The Scotchman', Samuel Wilmott, William Hodges, George Barker, George Wilkinson, Jonathan Butler, Jeremiah Jacklin, William Alcock, George Shaw, Sergeant Jackson, Joseph Falconbridge aka Josiah Smalley, Samuel Allen, George Lovat, Mr Lovat aka Lord 'Lovat', Samuel Evans, Benjamin Martin, Samuel Jevons, Joseph Slack, William Jeffrey, John Jeffrey, George Clay, Charles Shepherd, Thomas Pearson, Thomas Butler, John Bonnington, Abel Smith, William Bellamy, Thomas Shooter, Thomas Hooley, Joseph Hook, Henry Richards, Thomas Bramley aka 'The One-Eyed Man', Thomas Shelton, Anthony Ball, Mr Lowe.