

# THE ROWNTREE FAMILY AND THE SCHREINER RIOTS

This is the story of how a close-knit Quaker family tried valiantly to present an alternative view to the jingoism sweeping the country in connection with the Boer War at the turn of the nineteenth century. However, before relating the tale of the rioting that occurred in Scarborough during the night of Monday, 12 March 1900, it may be useful to say something about the family background, their business activities, their social conscience and the religious faith that underpinned it, for without this information it is perhaps difficult to understand the venom they faced a result of their actions.

## *QUAKER AND FARMING ROOTS*

Although, it is recorded that a Francis Rowntree of Stokesley was convinced by John Whitehead between 1650 and 1660, there are no records of a continuing Quaker link and the later Quaker Rowntrees are all descended from William (1727-1798) who joined Friends about 1750 and his wife Hannah ((1734-1801), who settled at a farm known as Riseborough, near Pickering, shortly after they married.<sup>1</sup>

William was of Yeoman stock, but he was clearly beginning to rise in the world and in his will he made mention of several properties in Pickering and divided nearly £3000 amongst his children and grandchildren. In addition to this, when William's son, also William (1768-1832), left Riseborough for Settrington, near Malton, the removal included 36 wagon loads of furniture and fittings, together with sheep, pigs, cattle and horses. It must have been a truly impressive sight.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the 19th century, the nearby town of Scarborough was growing rapidly, firstly as a centre of the fishing industry with a small, though fashionable Spa and then with the coming of the railway in 1845, as the hugely successful 'Queen of Watering Places', catering for a much wider public. The five Rowntree sons were clearly 'upwardly mobile' and through a network of Quaker apprenticeships, the eldest son, John (1757-1827), eventually became a grocer in Scarborough (which fact is central to this narrative), while another William (1806-1901), the son of Joseph (1774-1811), was the founder of a highly successful drapers and furniture store in the town. This bore his name for well over 100 years. In passing, it is perhaps worth mentioning that the more famous York branch of the

family is in fact a cadet branch of the Scarborough Rowntrees, as John's son Joseph (1801-1859) moved from Scarborough to York and subsequently founded the grocery business at The Pavement, which was the cradle of the world famous Cocoa works.<sup>3</sup>

#### *FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND POLITICS*

Throughout this period, the widespread branches of the family maintained the closest ties, both through their business and their Quaker activities. To illustrate this, Henry Isaac Rowntree (1838-1883) of York, writing in a delightful tongue-in-cheek fashion to Claude (1882-1959), the newly born son of his *third* cousin Allan (1853-1940) in Scarborough on 13 April 1882, vividly described the family characteristics, which are so important to this narrative.<sup>4</sup>

Dear Claude,

Please excuse my not writing before. .... Well, how does thou like this world as far as thou has seen it? On the whole thou will find a good deal that is nice in it. What does thou think to thy father and mother? I was pleased with thee for selecting them as thy parents and thought it did credit to thy judgement. From thy mother thou will inherit sweetness and light, from thy father numerous other qualities, whilst as a Rowntree thou will doubtless come in for a full share of the family gifts and graces.

As thou are but young yet, I will tell thee in confidence what very possibly thou might not hear from outsiders, that some of the more striking of these are Humility, Self-abnegation, a willingness to be guided by others, Reticence, Suavity of manner, and an entire absence of a critical or satirical spirit. Seeing then, dear child, that thou has all these advantages, see that thou walk worthy of them, especially do not keep thy mother awake at nights. Hate alcoholism, Tory-ism, Priest-craft and all other concrete forms of sin....

Accept the united love of my wife and myself and believe me, dear Claude to be now and ever (unless thou turned Tory),

Thy affectionate cousin

H.I. Rowntree

From this, it can be seen that the Rowntrees were almost to a man liberal in thought and politics. It was therefore not surprising that the Boer War raised questions in their minds that needed an active response.

*THE BOER WAR: A UNITED RESPONSE.*

Hope Hay Hewison, in *Hedge of Wild Almonds*,<sup>5</sup> has vividly described the divisions among British Friends resulting from the patriotic excesses that were created by the Boer War, but from the beginning, the Rowntrees (and almost inevitably, Scarborough Friends as a whole) appear to have been wholeheartedly on the side of peace and reconciliation. Indeed, it is no wonder that this was the case, as the list of members for 1902<sup>6</sup> indicates, that of the 132 members of the Meeting, no less than 27 were members of the Rowntree family. A further 8 were closely related to them and when Margaret T Metford came from Geneva to marry James Henry Rowntree in 1902, she was surprised<sup>7</sup> to find that she had joined no less than 7 other 'Mrs Rowntrees' in the Meeting. In this connection, it is perhaps worth noting that at the turn of the century-at least in Scarborough Meeting if not elsewhere-Friends testimony on titles appeared to be largely relegated to their business meetings and in day to day conversation and correspondence she would frequently have been 'Mrs (James Henry) Rowntree'<sup>8</sup>. This surprising acceptance of 'the world's ways' was also reflected in their unthinking attitude towards the place of women in society, who as a result, played virtually no direct part in the forthcoming narrative.

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Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner was a British born resident in South Africa and as such was invited by those on the side of peace, to come to England to try to put the record straight with regard to the causes of the war. His London supporters felt strongly that his voice should be heard in as many places as possible and a South African Conciliation Committee was formed in Scarborough<sup>9</sup> to promote this. Joshua Rowntree (1844-1915) was its president. At this point it is perhaps pertinent to say that this greatly loved Friend had been Liberal MP for the town from 1886-1892 and was still dedicated to its welfare, having deep sympathy for the poor and the oppressed. He was also a valiant worker for peace and shortly after the events related in this narrative, he visited South Africa 'under concern', to obtain greater knowledge of the effects of the war.<sup>10</sup>

*UNFRIENDLY WELCOME*

It is important to point out that although Samuel Cronwright was British born, he added the same name Schreiner to his own when he married Olive Schreiner, daughter of a Swiss German student from Basel. The public therefore assumed from his foreign sounding name,

that he was a Boer. As result of this, he had already had extremely hostile receptions in York and elsewhere and so the auguries were therefore not good for a quieter one in Scarborough. His travelling companion was the economist and anti-war activist. John. A. Hobson.<sup>11</sup>

The two men arrived in Scarborough during the afternoon of Monday, 12 March and were met by Joshua Rowntree and Richard Cross, a solicitor and prominent member of the Meeting and several other members of the committee. The station was filled with people who were obviously very unfriendly. Frank Rowntree of York was also on the same train and for some reason the crowd thought he was Cronwright-Schreiner. They therefore followed him out of the station booing and hooting, while the welcoming group took the opportunity to get their guests into a cab and to the home of Richard Cross, where they were to sleep.<sup>12</sup>

Arrangements had been made for Cronwright-Schreiner and Hobson to speak on the Tuesday evening at a public lecture at the Old Town Hall on 'The conditions for obtaining a durable peace in South Africa'. As a preliminary to this, there was to be a private 'At Home' at John Rowntree's Café in Westborough on the Monday evening, from 8.30pm to 10.30pm.<sup>13</sup> To set the scene, it is perhaps of interest to remember that the venue was one of some distinction. Frederick Rowntree, the Architect of the Friends Meeting House and of several local Rowntree residences, was for a time a partner of George Walton in Glasgow, who had also done work in the same city for Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the now world famous exponent of the Art Nouveau style. As a result of this, George Walton had been invited to design the café entrance and interiors and it consequently formed a very fashionable adjunct of John Rowntree's Grocery Shop.<sup>14</sup> A short distance up the street, William Rowntree & Sons drapers and furniture store dominated the scene and was equally fashionable.

However, details of the 'At Home' must have been leaked and as early as 7.00pm groups of people began to assemble in Westborough in the vicinity of the Café. Long before 8.00pm the crowd was of such dimensions that a large body of police was brought in to keep order and to form a cordon round the entrance to the café. The reporter from the weekly *Scarborough Mercury*<sup>15</sup> reported that the crowd mostly consisted of young men who sang 'Soldiers of the Queen', 'Rule Britannia', and 'God save the Queen'. In between, they cheered the army and 'various other celebrities with which this war has tended to familiarise the men in the street'.

When the speakers arrived, they were greeted with shouts of derision. Someone then came along with a Union Jack and there was prolonged uproar. The police tried to keep the crowd clear of the café. Somebody flung a stone at the windows and 'the crashing of glass heralded several hours of smashing and wrecking'<sup>16</sup>, the crowd cheering and applauding as each pane of glass was shattered. The chairman of the Watch Committee joined the Chief Constable and they decided together that the promoters of the meeting should be warned of the danger that might accrue if they persisted in holding it.

#### *A CROWD OUT OF CONTROL*

Inside the Restaurant, about 35 'ladies and gentlemen' were present.<sup>17</sup> Some tried to ignore what was happening outside and quietly drank tea or coffee. Others were too uneasy to do so. Every moment it was becoming more evident that the crowd outside were becoming more violent and in due course the Chairman of the Watch Committee and the Chief Constable entered the premises and advised Joshua Rowntree that it would not be possible to hold the crowd at bay much longer unless the lights were turned off and the company left the building.

At first there was reluctance to abandon the meeting and miss the opportunity to hear two powerful speakers. The members of the Conciliation Committee went to the first floor to discuss the situation. Joshua Rowntree said that it had been his opinion that the meeting should be held and that the preservation of order should have been left to the authorities.<sup>18</sup> However, it now appeared that the onus of responsibility rested with the committee, as the authorities had advised that matters were beyond their control. He felt that the situation was extremely humiliating and had never thought that such happenings could occur in Scarborough. The matter was then put to the committee and they decided that in view of the dangers, both the 'At Home' and the Public Meeting would have to be abandoned. The lights were then turned off as suggested and those assembled left the building by a side entrance. Most had merely to run a gauntlet of jeers, but some found themselves the objects of physical violence and were knocked down in the street. Joshua Rowntree met a 'well dressed' young man who smashed his hat in and called him "Judas".<sup>19</sup> He subsequently had to shelter in a hotel, but eventually was able to make his way home. Cronwright-Schreiner was however not recognised by the crowd and escaped with the aid of Marion Rowntree to the home of Richard Cross.<sup>20</sup> Several members of the committee met there to review the situation and the Chief Constable

also came to advise Richard Cross that his visitors must leave the town early the next morning.

#### *MOUNTED POLICE*

Meanwhile, the crowd was so incensed that it continued in its attempts to wreck the café. An imaginative entrepreneur sold stones at six for a penny. Time and again, the crowd pushed its way to the front of the building and time and again the police pushed them back. Two policemen received severe wounds from flying stones and this state of affairs continued until about 11.00pm. At this point, it was decided that half a dozen of the constables would be provided with horses hired from 'Mr Robinson's stud in Westborough' and these created a sensation by riding through the crowd several times. However, a number of people then proceeded to throw stones at the police. As a result of this, some of them were quite badly hurt and they had to be withdrawn. The crowd, having determined that it was impossible to inflict any further damage on the café, then moved up to John Rowntree & Sons Grocers shop and then to W Rowntree & Sons store and broke all the windows that were not protected by shutters, with considerable damage to the goods exposed for sale. The reporter from the *Scarborough Mercury* wrote 'One almost felt appalled at the thought of this fine building—one of the most handsome in the provinces, being at the mercy of a crowd who seemed to have lost self-control'.<sup>21</sup> He might have added the damage to the beautifully fitted out café was in its way much more tragic, although he was of course not aware of the future reverence that would be accorded to the Art Nouveau style.

#### *TROOPS CALLED OUT*

It had now become apparent that a desperate situation required desperate measures. The military authorities at the local barracks were contacted by Mayor and the Chairman of the Watch Committee and shortly afterwards eighty soldiers made their way to the police station, where they were held in readiness. It was then determined that they should 'extend lines' and march to the periphery of the trouble. At this point it was decided to read the Riot Act if the crowd had not dispersed, but it was still hoped that such drastic measures would not be necessary. However, the crowd, instead of making a show of resistance, used the opportunity to demonstrate its support of the Army, Queen and Country by singing 'Soldiers of the Queen' once again and cheering enthusiastically.<sup>22</sup>

The soldiers, lead by the Deputy Mayor and the Town Clerk, then marched on to the heart of the demonstration in Westborough, where the Rowntree shops were located. The column halted and the crowd signalled its reappearance by yet another full voiced rendering of 'Soldiers of the Queen'.<sup>23</sup> The Officer in charge, a Captain Fell then used the opportunity to ask the crowd to disperse. "You have sung 'Soldiers of the Queen' and I only wish that you would now let my men go home to bed." It was now 1.30am but the streets still took some time to clear.<sup>24</sup>

#### A VENDETTA

Unfortunately, one section of the crowd still wanted to teach the Rowntrees a lesson and they proceeded to the homes of Joshua, and Allan Rowntree, broke their windows and did much other damage. The apprentices who slept over the grocers shop were in some danger, but John Watson Rowntree stayed behind to ensure their safety. When he too arrived home, he found his house had been subjected to a great deal of damage as the rioters had broken down a wall in order to obtain bricks to use as missiles. William and Mary Rowntree, who had reached the then remarkable ages of 93 and 87, had for obvious reasons not attended the At Home. Their son, James Henry Rowntree, who lived with them, had also been unable to do so as he was in bed with influenza.<sup>25</sup> However, this did not save them from the wrath of the crowd, as they were clearly prime representatives of the largest Quaker undertaking in the town. The front door was broken open, the gas lamp over it was then smashed and a fusillade of stones followed. However, William and Mary were reportedly sleeping at the rear of the house and due to age (and deafness?) did not hear a thing. The local reporter present at the scene wrote, 'Too much cannot be said in condemnation of the tactics of a mob which might have resulted very seriously for the venerable couple, *whom even the rioters, when in their saner frame of mind must respect and revere*'.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, despite the events of the night, when William Rowntree died the following year, the *Tory Scarborough Gazette*<sup>27</sup> recorded his good works in a full-page eulogy which vied in length and superlatives with that of Queen Victoria, in the same issue of that paper!

As with most events of this nature, there are variations in the story. Writing his reminiscences in the winter of 1935/6, George Rowntree (1855-1940) says that Mary Rowntree had just given William a cup of hot milk when she heard the sound of broken glass from the other side of the house. He also recollects that while his brother John Watson Rowntree was coming home from the Café, his sister-in-law

Priscilla, had to hold a counterpane over the bed of her invalid son to ward off stones, which broke the window, a jug and a basin. His version of the closing moments of the riot suggests that Captain Fell finally persuaded the crowd to go home by inviting them to sing 'God Save the Queen'.<sup>28</sup> He does not however indicate whether they took up his invitation!

At the same time as all this was going on, George was chairing another meeting in the town, which was being addressed by General Booth. He records:

The next morning, I took the General to the station to see him off by train. As the train began to move, a certain Hull solicitor put his head out of the window and shouted, "Rowntree, I am glad of what happened last night. You deserve it." Three Salvation Army young women replied, 'we don't know who you are, but you are no gentleman.'<sup>29</sup>

#### AFTERMATH

The day after was, of course, involved with clearing up and counting the cost, a good part of which was covered by insurance. The fashionable and artistic café was indeed in a sorry mess, with lead work to the stained glass windows twisted and broken into all sorts of fantastic shapes. The decorators had been at work for the previous fortnight painting the internal woodwork a 'pure white,' but it had suffered a great deal of damage and its appearance on the Tuesday morning was anything but artistic.. Further up the road at the Grocers shop, a great deal of damage had been done as a result of glass being scattered over the stock and among other things, twenty-seven bottles of fruits, exhibited in the window, had been smashed. There was not so much damage at William Rowntree's Store, but nine of the very large plate glass windows to the shop front were broken, together with fourteen other subsidiary windows.<sup>30</sup> In present day terms, the total reported cost of the damage to the Rowntree properties sounds trivial, but it would certainly be equivalent to a five-figure sum in today's money.

The full-page report in the *Scarborough Mercury* of 16 March included large line drawings showing the condition of John Rowntree's Grocers shop and café and W Rowntree & Sons emporium, with the windows dramatically boarded up or smashed. There were apparently rumours of further rioting and almost the entire police force was placed on duty in Westborough, the main shopping street and Newborough, its sister street. Some youths attempted to unfurl flags and banners, but these were confiscated.

Towards evening the military marched into town once again, but there was never any likelihood that their services would be needed. On the whole, it appeared that the authorities had done their best throughout a most difficult twenty-four hours and the fact there was no reported looting is evidence of this.

*A QUIET DEPARTURE*

In the meantime, Cronwright-Schreiner and Hobson, who had spent the night at the home of Richard Cross, were quietly taken in a cab to join the York train, which was specially stopped for them at Ganton Station, a few miles outside the town. They must have had a rather disturbed night as George Rowntree, in a letter to a sympathiser,<sup>31</sup> records that about midnight, a small part of the crowd, trying to find the house of William Stickney Rowntree, rang the door of the wrong house—that of Richard Cross. Their spokesman was surprised to find his wife fully dressed at such a late hour, but asked where Mr 'Skreener'(!) was. She replied that she had not gone to the meeting but that she understood that he had left the café and gone somewhere quite safe. She then wished them goodnight, closed the door and joined Cronwright Schreiner, Hobson and her husband in the Sitting Room. The three had all been safely in the house for over two hours. George Rowntree remarks dryly that if the crowd had decided to go to his home—"Riseborough," they might perhaps have had a somewhat warmer reception from his guest—General Booth!

It is not often appreciated how ignorant of world affairs many people were at the time. Another member of the Meeting, Edward Wallis, was accosted by 'a country woman' who said "Well you know I am sorry for them Rowntrees, but what could they expect, whatever did they bring an Afghan(!) down here for." A Mr Barker also remarked to George Rowntree 'with much earnestness that he was delighted for all the damage we had received and only wished more had been done and that Schreiner had been killed.'<sup>32</sup>

While most people settled down and soon forgot the momentous happenings of March 12, other did not. Exactly two years later, a clearly disturbed person sent an anonymous postcard<sup>33</sup> to

Rowntree and Sons, reading:

TRAITORS  
MARCH 12 1900  
PRO BOERS  
NOT FORGOTTEN  
BOYCOTTED

The lettering was underlined many times and adjacent to it there was a drawing of a gallows on which dangled three stick figures labelled 'WS', 'A' and 'JH'—William Stickney, Allan and James Henry Rowntree, the three brothers and remaining business partners, following the death of their father in 1901.

More than 70 years after the event, it was still the subject of dispute. In 1974, a Mrs Norah Close recollected that in 1900 she lived in the schoolhouse at Scalby, four miles out of the town. She re-called that "a small body of men were creeping—that is the only word for it—past our front gate and up a lonely lane."<sup>34</sup> The village reportedly learned later that it had been Cronwright-Schreiner and his party escaping from Scarborough to take refuge at 'Wrea Head,' which was the home of John Edward Ellis and Maria Ellis (née Rowntree). While this makes a plausible and rather exciting story, there is far too much evidence that the truth was more prosaic.

#### EVENTS ELSEWHERE

After these traumatic events, normality returned bit by bit. However, meetings at Croydon, Halifax, Leeds and elsewhere were cancelled and trouble was reported in other cities. On the Tuesday evening the matter was raised by Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman in the House of Commons when he enquired whether the Government intended to ascertain the extent to which the disturbances had been organised and to take steps to see that they were not repeated. Meanwhile, in Scarborough the law had to take its course where arrests had been made. The *Scarborough Gazette*<sup>35</sup> reported that a Mr H J Richards was charged at the Magistrates Court with kicking in a window belonging to John Rowntree & Sons and amazingly, William Stickney Rowntree was 'in the Chair'. George Rowntree on behalf of Messrs Rowntree said that there was no desire on the part of the firm to press charges, as the defendant had been clearly under the influence of drink and was not a party to the riotous proceedings. The bench however felt that it had to uphold the law and the defendant was fined 15s 6d including costs and the cost of the damage. The incident however indicated as attitude of fairness and tolerance on the part of the Rowntrees that was commendable.

#### A RECONCILING GESTURE

So far as the law was concerned, the Riot (Damages) Act of 1886 allowed tradesmen whose premises were attacked to claim compensation from the County Police Rate<sup>36</sup> and it was generally assumed that this course would be pursued. However, the Rowntree

family was of a different calibre and on 21 March, just over a week after the riots, Joshua Rowntree drafted an address 'To the inhabitants of Scarborough' on behalf of those who might have made such a claim. This was then printed and distributed round the town<sup>37</sup> and is so remarkable that it merits quoting in full:

Fellow Townsmen.

It is our desire that the sores arising from the recent visit of Mr Cronwright-Schreiner to Scarborough may speedily be healed. As one contribution to this end, we wish to state that it is not our intention to make any claim against the Borough Fund<sup>38</sup> for property damaged or destroyed during the riot which occurred on the night of the 'Reception' given by one of our number.

The loss of property, though not light to some of us, is as nothing compared with the peril to which some of those dearer to us than life were that night exposed; or with the loss of free speech won for us by brave men and women of old.

We respectfully submit to our fellow townsmen of all creeds and parties, that the wrecking of buildings and especially midnight assaults on the homes of women, children and aged persons are acts of cruel lawlessness, which nothing can justify.

Enquiries made seem to show that the violence was chiefly the result of the delusion that the visitor to our town, a Colonial fellow-subject of British blood, who had come to lecture on 'The conditions of a durable peace in South Africa' was a Boer, whose life might fairly be taken; and that it was encouraged by some who ought to know better. Edmund Burke's entreaty to his fellows, 'so to be patriots as not to forget to be gentlemen' seems still to be needed.

We are at one in desiring the honour and greatness of our country; we are intensely anxious for the good name of the British Empire amongst the nations of the earth. But we hold that the fostering of prejudice and enmity, even against our foes, is in the long run hurtful to ourselves and that injustice to strangers never leads to justice to our own people.

Our convictions on some great questions are, we know, different from those of our fellow countrymen; but for these convictions we must render our account not to men but to God.

If we are wrong, resort to lynch law will not set us right; whilst it inflicts serious injury on the whole community.

We desire to acknowledge with sincere thanks many expressions of support and sympathy from both strangers and friends. History often has to reverse the popular verdicts of the day and we believe it will reverse the verdict of violence, which has been given against us.—Yours truly,

William Rowntree  
Joshua Rowntree  
W.S. Rowntree  
James H. Rowntree

Allan Rowntree  
John Watson Rowntree  
George Rowntree  
William Smith.

Fine words, but who was William Smith and why did he also suffer damage to his property? The list of members for 1902 indicates that he too was a Friend, although perhaps a more abrasive one than the other signatories. In addition to this, his background was less 'well-to-do', as his father was a Lancashire miner. His mother however, came from an old Quaker family. He had arrived in Scarborough sometime before 1890 as an inspector for the NSPCC, but by 1900 he was the editor and publisher of the *Scarborough Advertiser*. This was roughly equivalent to a modern free newspaper. He often used it as a vehicle for regular publication of his controversial views and for writing scathing attacks on the supposed squandering of ratepayers money by Scarborough town councillors—who consequently disliked him <sup>39</sup>

#### A MERCILESS PARODY

'Advertiser Smith'—as he was generally known in the town—made the mistake of adopting a pro-Boer stance in his paper and when he wrote that the rioters had behaved like 'degraded savages',<sup>40</sup> it was almost inevitable that there would be some sort of riposte. In due course, this came in form of a merciless 12-page parody on *The House that Jack Built*, which was published anonymously.

The cover entitled *The House where Smiff Dwelt*, shows a bearded spirit (clearly a ghostly Joshua Rowntree!) emerging from a steaming cup of Rowntrees elect cocoa and holding a halo over a kneeling 'Smiff,' while the poem,<sup>41</sup> supposedly composed by a certain 'A. De-Grey Dedsavage' and dedicated to 'my fellow degraded savages,' backs up the thesis that Smith and his accomplices were sanctimonious and out of touch with the real world. In support of this, Smith is shown as a small bearded revolutionary (actually a bit

like Keir Hardie, of whom more anon!) holding a copy of his paper inscribed 'the Gospel according to Smiff.' A text floats behind him, reading—'Lord, I thank thee I am not as other men,' while the poem concludes with advertisements on behalf of Smith, 'Local Helper of the Lord.'

#### WIDER REACTIONS

Searches through the Minutes of Scarborough Preparative Meeting for the Spring of 1900 reveal little and it must therefore be assumed that the Meeting was not a formal supporter of the Conciliation Committee. However, Minute 7 of 15 April 1900<sup>42</sup> records the receipt of Minutes from Southport and Bradford Preparative Meetings and gratefully acknowledges 'these expressions of kindly feeling and Christian sympathy towards those of our members who were sufferers through the regrettable incidents of a few weeks ago.' About 150 letters of sympathy were also received by the Rowntree family from every corner of the country, many of them from the leading Friends and others of the day. Keir Hardie wrote somewhat melodramatically from Glasgow:

Pardon a stranger for expressing his sympathy with you in the dastardly outrage to which you have been subjected at the hands of the easily mislead mob. Having experienced, on a small scale, somewhat similar treatment. I feel sure that your uppermost feeling is not anger but pity for the misguided people who only see an enemy in those who save them from participation in the great crime now being perpetrated, which can only bring sorrow to the nation. I have often tried to picture the scene outside the judgement hall in Jerusalem when the maddened multitude..... wildly shouted 'Not this man but Barabbas,' but I never dreamt of having to endure the horror of having the scene re-enacted before my eyes and can only pray as he did, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do'.<sup>43</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

It is perhaps worthwhile to ask why it was that the Rowntree family was the subject of so much venom. Certainly, their success in business gave them the freedom to spend time on activities of their own choosing, but their strong principles and social conscience could on occasion lead to unpopularity. In particular, Joshua Rowntree, who was a successful solicitor, had come to an agreement with his partner that he should reserve a certain amount of his time for social

and allied work.<sup>44</sup> This enabled him to serve as an Member of Parliament, together with his brother-in-law and closest friend, John Edward Ellis, while in addition to his work as a Justice of the Peace, he had also been Mayor. Two other Rowntree signatories were subsequently Mayors and throughout a good part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were always Rowntrees on the Town Council. In addition to this, they were Justices of the Peace, Magistrates, Poor Law Commissioners and Directors of the Gas and Water Companies. They were also involved with countless other voluntary endeavours, working for the improvement of the town.<sup>45</sup>

In view of all this worthy activity, the events of 12 March 1900 must have come to some as a wonderful opportunity to 'have a go' at members of a family who sometimes seemed 'holier than thou,' or simply to settle old scores. For others, there may have been a more straightforward political clash. In support of this, a letter writer in the *Scarborough Mercury*<sup>46</sup> observed that the riots 'appeared to be a remnant of that bitter feeling that has been shown against the victims of the disturbance from time to time by a section of their political opponents, who consider they have old scars to wipe out.' Indeed, writing almost exactly 100 years after these momentous events, it is perhaps true that the Rowntrees may have exercised a degree of power and perhaps, paternalism that would not be acceptable today. Their hearts were however in the right place and they clearly understood that they were responding to an event of the most profound significance to the future history of Southern Africa. For this we must give thanks.

*Metford Robson*

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

A good deal of the following information was readily available to the author from manuscripts, books and cuttings in the possession of his family. He does however appreciate that if time had permitted, his reseaches might have benefited from greater reference to official sources.

<sup>1</sup> C Brightwen Rowntree, *The Rowntrees of Riseborough* (The Sessions Book Trust, 1986), p vii. First published 1940 and updated by E Margaret Sessions in 1979, 1982 and 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Ditto, p. ix

<sup>3</sup> Ditto, p. 2/A2

<sup>4</sup> Ditto, p. x

- 5 Hope Hay Hewison, *Hedge of Wild Almonds* (James Currey, London 1989), Chapter 8, British 'Quakers and the Public Debate' and Chapter 9, 'The Quaker Debate,' pp117-123.
- 6 List of Members for Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting, 1902.
- 7 Memory of A Esther Robson (1904–), last surviving grandchild of William Rowntree (1806–1901).
- 8 According to AER (daughter of Margaret T Rowntree).
- 9 *Scarborough Mercury* 16 March 1900, p. 5
- 10 S E Robson, *Joshua Rowntree* (George Allen & Unwin 1916), Chapter vii, pp. 117–123.
- 11 Hope Hay Hewison, *Hedge of Wild Almonds*, Chapter 8, p.117
- 12 George Rowntree, *Reminiscences* (Published privately), 1936), p. 41.
- 13 *Scarborough Mercury*, 16 March 1900, p.5.
- 14 Nikolaus Pevsner, *Studies in Art, Architecture and Design* (1968),p. 178 (Re–printed from the *RIBA Journal*, 3rd Series XLVI, 1939).
- 15 *Scarborough Mercury* 16 March 1900, p.5.
- 16 Ditto.
- 17 Ditto.
- 18 Ditto.
- 19 George Rowntree, *Reminiscences*, p. 45.
- 20 Information from undated unsigned typescript letter to an unknown recipient, but references clearly indicate that it was from George Rowntree.
- 21 *Scarborough Mercury*, 16 March 1900, p. 5.
- 22 *Scarborough Mercury*, 16 March 1900, p. 5 and cutting from *Scarborough Gazette*, undated, but clearly March 1900.
- 23 *Scarborough Mercury*, 16 March 1900, p.5.
- 24 George Rowntree, *Reminiscences*, p. 46.
- 25 According to A. Esther Robson (daughter of James Henry Rowntree).
- 26 *Scarborough Mercury*, 16 March 1900, p. 5. *author's*. This warm–hearted comment is of special interest to the author, as it refers to his great grandparents, while their son James Henry Rowntree was his grandfather.
- 27 *Scarborough Gazette*, 31 January 1901.
- 28 George Rowntree, *Reminiscences*, p. 46.
- 29 Ditto, p. 47.
- 30 *Scarborough Mercury*, 16 March 1900, p. 5.
- 31 Typescript letter from George Rowntree, as referred to in <sup>20</sup> Rumour had it, incorrectly, that Cronwright–Schreiner and Hobson were spirited out of the town in a Rowntree's furniture van.
- 32 Ditto.
- 33 Postcard written in black ink with a script pen, date stamped 12.3.02.
- 34 Newspaper cutting from *Scarborough Evening News*, 5 March 1974.
- 35 Cutting from *Scarborough Gazette*, undated, but clearly March 1900.
- 36 Ditto. The reporter notes with regret that any claim from the County Police Rate would also impose a burden on the North Riding ratepayers.
- 37 Several copies of the original address are extant.
- 38 The relationship of the 'Borough Fund' to the 'County Police Rate,' as clearly defined in the *Scarborough Gazette*,<sup>36</sup> is not clear. Perhaps the signatories were

referring to a Borough allocation within the Police Rate?

- 39 Undated Letter from W G Whincup of Buih Wells, grandson of 'Advertiser Smith,' in response to an article in the *Scarborough Evening News* of 5 March 1974.
- 40 Ditto.
- 41 *The House where Smiff Dwelt* (publisher/author unknown) 1900. Several copies are probably extant.
- 42 Minute Book of Scarborough Preparative Meeting, 1885–1904. Ref DQR 10/6, Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull.
- 43 George Rowntree, *Reminiscences*, p. 48.
- 44 S E Robson. *Joshua Rowntree* (George Allen & Unwin 1916), Chapter 2, p. 33.
- 45 Information from various sources in The Scarborough Room, Scarborough Public Library and 'Whose Who in Yorkshire' 1912.
- 46 Newspaper cutting from the *Scarborough Mercury*, 25 March 1900.