

# The Luc(k)raft Newsletter

September 1997

Edition 3

## Benjamin Lucraft

### the centenary of his death

Benjamin Lucraft died on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1897, and so this edition is mainly given over to a summary of his life and achievements, which several people have requested.

But the wider research still continues. New lines of enquiry have arisen in the Naval Luckraft family tree. Included in this are three distantly related existing descendants. Two of them have paintings of Admiral Luckraft and Rear Admiral Luckraft. They have now been identified, and hopefully the next edition might have reproductions of the paintings.

The Newsletters have been received at the Devon County Record Office, and the Society of Genealogists, and they will continue to be sent there.

My apologies for the delay since the last newsletter; Gwen and I have had a lot of church and community work, involving new project work and new buildings which have been taking up our time. The erratic nature of the newsletter is one reason I decided to make it a free newsletter; then I am not beholden.

Thank you to those who have written in since the last letter; all your comments and suggestions are helpful.

Thank you to those who sent contributions. Could I please ask if overseas contributors could send their donations in currency notes, or stamps, as the banks take nearly all of a cheque for changing it?

#### Web-Site on the Internet

There is now a Lucraft Web-site, written by my 15-year-old son, (thank you, Daniel). It's in its early stages, and its main purpose is to put a presence on the Internet for the Luc(k)raft One Name Study, where genealogists are increasingly searching for research sites of interest to them. When time permits, it will be extended, with searchable files attached.

I've already had some e-mails from people who've found it at [www.lucraft@demon.co.uk](mailto:www.lucraft@demon.co.uk).

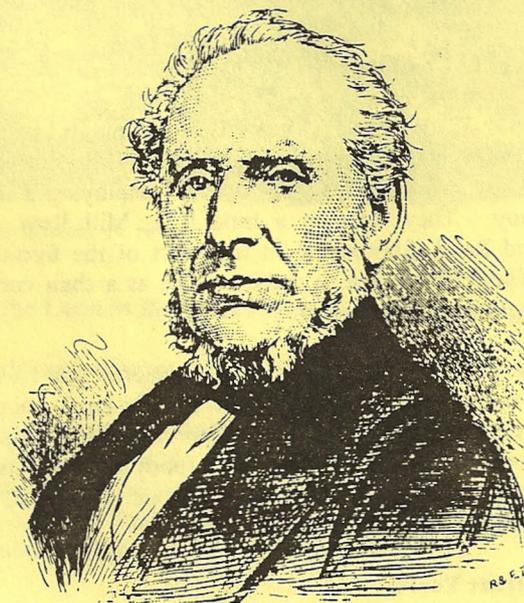
PRICE ONE PENNY.

## BENJAMIN LUCRAFT:

A BIOGRAPHY.

BY GEORGE H. DYER, <sup>K</sup>

Author of "Richard Cobden, the Friend of the People," &c.



The front cover of Benjamin's Election Biography; 1880

#### Data Protection Act Disclaimer

All the Luc(k)raft data is now being entered into a new genealogical research program. I've finally got round to buying *The Master Genealogist for Windows* and the data is slowly going in.

Therefore, will all Luc(k)rafts please note that the data collected in the course of my research is being entered onto my computer, and it will be used only for my research. Privacy and confidentiality is still assured where requested.

## The Early Days

The young ploughboy who taught himself to read, was born on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1809. His parents came from Broadclyst, a large village outside Exeter, where his father had been a cabinet maker. He was baptised at Exeter St Paul, the cathedral, about three weeks later on 16<sup>th</sup> December.

His indenture of apprenticeship, when he was 14, under the poor law in Broadclyst, was in *husbandry*, or farming, to William Lucraft, probably his grandfather, though in later life he is described as a ploughboy, and as a cabinet maker.

As a young man of 20, he joined Attwood's Political Union, and the year after he's with his parents in Taunton, where the family were cabinet makers at a house on North Street, and later on East Leach. Here he married Mary Pearce, whose family also lived on East Leach, in St Mary Magdalene, Taunton, on Christmas Eve 1830, when he was 21.

The following November their first child, George Seeley Lucraft was born. In later life George would found the furniture making company in London that employed his father Ben. George also followed his father's interest in radical politics, and chaired the committee to promote the Labour candidate in 1890, in succession to his father.

## Ben moves to London

About 1831-32 Ben and his young family come to London, bringing with them at least his mother, Mary. In the 1841 census Mary is listed as a chaircarver, employing a man and a boy. They lived in a little lane, Mill Row, off Kingsland Road, Shoreditch, in the heart of the furniture trade. There Ben began to make a name as a chair carver and draughtsman of furniture.

We know that there were other possible Lucraft relatives in London at the time, so perhaps they already knew people. Certainly, Shoreditch was the place for cabinet makers to settle down. Several children were born over the next years, and in 1846 Ben became a Total Abstinence, in response to the alcohol problems of the time.

## The Chartist Years

Ben is thought to have joined the Chartists around 1848, and was present at the historic meeting of the Chartists on Kennington Common on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1848. There were many emerging political organisations, seeking change, and Ben joined some of them. He was active in Richard Cobden's Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, and became the Secretary, and most prominent member of the North London Political Union. He spoke around London for the Wheatsheaf Temperance Society. Ben shared the chair at the last Chartist Conference in London in 1858, out of which emerged the Reform League, with a programme of manhood suffrage, a ballot for elections to parliament, tri-ennial parliaments, equal electoral districts, and the abolition of property qualifications for people to vote.

Though we don't yet know his trade union affiliations, he was one of those who helped impress on the craft unions the need not just for activity over wages and conditions,

but, as he said in a letter he wrote to the *Reynold's Newspaper* in 1861; "I should hope that the operative builders are by this time convinced that political power has something to do with the social conditions of the people."

## The First International

Ben was at the inaugural meeting of what became known as the First International of the International Working Men's Association. The meeting was described by Karl Marx, who was there, in a famous letter to Freidrich Engels dated 4<sup>th</sup> November 1864. Ben was elected to the committee, and played an active part in its work, sometimes chairing its meetings.

The International worked to support fledgling working-class organisations round the world, and Ben is a signatory to many of its letters and declarations. He travelled to Geneva in 1866 for the London Trades Council, and to the Brussels Congress in 1868, and the Basle Conference in 1869 for the IWMA, where radical political groups from all round Europe were present.

## Agitation for Reform

By the mid 1860's sections of the working classes were fed up with the lack of constitutional change, and Ben, who had been leading weekly marches and demonstrations in Clerkenwell, and Shoreditch, escalated the action with marches into central London, to Trafalgar Square. They had a wagon for a platform, a band to lead the singing, and a banner for the men from Clerkenwell.

The Times thundered against these "unwashed" people who came to demonstrate in "our Square". If they wanted to demonstrate they should do so in their own part of town, the Times Leader writer suggested.

On the evening of 27<sup>th</sup> June 1866, Ben led a thousand demonstrators to the West End, where an estimated 10,000 had already assembled. The pressure for reform became so great, that the more moderate Reform League had to take account of the strength of feeling, and took over the organisation of the next demonstration, when 80,000 people were estimated to have attended. So they decided to hold an even bigger rally in Hyde Park on 23<sup>rd</sup> July. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner banned the demonstration but most people ignored the prohibition.

The workers forced their way through the police cordons, to a noisy rally, where some of the park railings were pushed over. This became known in the press as "The Hyde Park Riot". More demonstrations were banned, this time by Spencer Walpole, the Home Secretary, but then allowed to proceed, because of the very large numbers that gathered, in spite of the thousands of police and troops on duty.

The Home Secretary resigned, and Disraeli removed the last obstacles within the Bill, and the Bill became law, allowing a greatly increased number of working men the vote. The Illustrated London News said when the people had invaded Hyde Park, that some of it was being reserved "as a lounge for some fashionable people".



THE MOB PULLING DOWN THE RAILINGS IN PARK-LANE.

### The Hyde Park Riots, from a print in the *London Illustrated News*

#### The Ultra-radical Years

Ben was in the ultra-radical ranks in these years, he was involved in many of the great issues of the time. When he went to Basle he argued not only for land nationalisation, but for the large-scale cultivation of the land by the state on behalf of the people. Here were the early hints of collectivization. He explained that as he travelled by train through France, he saw the fragmentation of the land into tiny plots that had followed the French Revolution; a fragmentation which had made profitability for the people so difficult. These opinions were described as “scandalous” when reported in the British press.

He took part in the sensitive debates on Fenianism, Irish Home Rule, in 1867, arguing that the Irish “were fully justified in using physical force to redress their wrongs.” The press condemned Ben and others, for these views, and for letters about the war in France, in 1871, and Ben resigned from the IWMA.

He joined the Land and Labour League in 1869, as the most radical organisation in Britain, and served on its council. He was one of the founder members of John Stuart Mill’s Land Tenure Reform Association, urging state control of land in 1870.

#### Education Issues

Ben’s interest in education had sprung out of his passion for reform of the apprentice system. Perhaps he had seen its effects. He certainly saw its product when he went to Paris in 1871 for the Royal Society of Arts, to report for them on the state of continental furniture making.

In his report he proposed a new system of technical education, and these ideas eventually became part of the Technical School system years later. He was particularly concerned that draughtsmanship be included in the syllabus for craft training.

Ben had been one of the promoters of the First Working Men’s Exhibition in the Agricultural Hall in 1865, and he went on to promote the idea of a school or college for the furniture trade. Such a school was founded, and still flourishes in Shoreditch. He proposed a museum of East London craft work, skills and tools.

In 1870 he was selected to stand for election for the new London School Board, which set up the Board Schools after Forster’s Education Act. He was the only “working man” to be elected, and the election party was in *the Hole in the Wall*, in Hatton Garden.

## London School Board

On the Board, Ben fought for many issues. He opposed the office of paid chairmen; he opposed the use of the cane; he always argued for free education; he was vigorous against military drill for children in the Board Schools; he was chair of the committee which investigated the misappropriation of historic charities by the wealthy public schools; he was early in demanding compulsory education for all, and the removal of fees.

He was re-elected every three years until he retired in 1890, aged 80, as the longest serving member.

A large painting of the whole School Board was done in 1873, and Ben is standing with his friend the radical journalist Thomas Bywater Smithies, another Board Member. The painting hung for many years behind the desk of the leader of the Inner London School Board, in County Hall, on the South Bank. Its present location is not known, but a photo of it exists.

## Peace and other issues

Ben was active in a range of radical groups. These included Total Abstinence, the Working Men's Club and Institute Union, the Workman's Peace Association, of which he was for nine years the chairman, and for whom he went to Paris and other Conferences.

He stood unsuccessfully for Parliament in Tower Hamlets, as one of the first Liberal-Labour candidates ever.

More controversial was his active support of Josephine Butler in the Working Men's National League for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. These Acts gave the authorities powers to discriminate against women with sexually transmitted diseases, and were causing great distress particularly among the poorer women of the urban areas. He described the Acts as "the very worst class of party legislation", saying to working men, who were

mostly too embarrassed to discuss such things, that "It is *your* sisters, *your* daughters, that these acts are to entrap – to make use of. Not only for the army, not only for the common soldiers, but for the officers and gentlemen."

## Woodwork and his last years

He kept at his trade of chair-carver into his 80's contentedly working for his son, George, in the company that ran through into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Only two chairs are known still to exist. One is in the possession of a descendant, and the other was the chair he was asked to make by the Liberal Party when it wanted to make a gift to William Gladstone. This chair was re-discovered 20 years ago by the author, and another great great grandson, Jack Edmonds Lucraft generously paid for it to be restored. It is in Gladstone's home at Hawarden. The irony is that the chair was made by the man who in the 1860's had been called 'a cabinet breaker, rather than a cabinet maker' in the House of Commons.

Ben died at his home, 18 Green Lanes, at Newington Green, London, which still stands, on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1997. The funeral oration was recorded in the local paper, in which the Rev J Ellis, of Barnsbury Chapel, spoke of a man "who while working for the generations through which he lived, had brought benefits that future generations would enjoy." Ben was buried in Abney Park cemetery, and his grave can still be seen.

There was a large number of relatives, friends and former colleagues present, including a representative from way back in Broadclyst. Natural flowers were placed on the polished coffin, and Mr Ellis quoted Longfellow's Psalm of Life:

The lives of all great men remind us,  
We should make our lives sublime,  
And departing leave behind us,  
Footprints on the sands of time.

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A photo of my father, Edward Arthur Lucraft, born 23.9.1924, serving during the war in the R.A.F. (Second from the left)

If anyone has photos or other items that they think would interest the readers of the newsletters, please send copies in; contributions acknowledged and returned.

