

(SOPS) However, the SLSA had won a legal case against a local shipowner and magistrate John Davidson who had failed to pay workers for fitting out his ship.

Specifically, the 1825 strike was about offloading ballast at sea from unladen boats returning to the port. The SLSA argued that this was dangerous work as vessels could capsize and crews were not paid additional wages.

SLSA members had prevented ships from leaving port the day before the massacre after attempts to negotiate a settlement collapsed.

The SLSA had proposed the strike would end if the shipowners promised to provide work opportunities for union men and pay for offloading ballast at land or sea. The shipowners rejected this proposal, so striking seamen returned to the river on their small coble boats to prevent larger ships from sailing.

The shipowners attempted to break the strike by recruiting non-unionised labour and special constables to get ships out to sea.

Initially frustrated, they turned to Davidson who was deeply antagonistic to the SLSA following the outcome of the legal case, where he had lost £200 (approx. £24,000 equivalent today) in legal fees.

At Sunderland harbour, Davidson boarded a steam packet and was joined by least eight soldiers from the 3rd Light Dragoons, under

command of Lieutenant Phillips.

Striking seamen on the river retreated to the stony beach at North Sands. More than 100 people, including women and children, had gathered there by that time. As the steam packet ventured closer to the riverbank, some women in the crowd started throwing stones.

Davidson consulted with Lieutenant Phillips, and the soldiers opened fire. According to a SLSA report soldiers fired into the crowd as if it were targeting practice.

Three died within an hour on the beach, and at least two others died within the next two days. Six were seriously wounded, and the exact number of deaths may never be known. Local people demanded a murder inquest for the dead but the inquests returned verdicts of 'justifiable homicide' for the first three deaths and 'accidental death' for others.

The funeral procession comprised of around 1,200 people. Mourners sang and solemnly placed a British flag on the coffins. Criminal court cases followed in October 1825, and eight strikers were imprisoned. Further seamen strikes occurred in 1826 and 1831, but neither had such a bloody ending.

Dr David Gordon Scott from The Open University and lead organiser of the commemorations said that massacre was an event of enormous national

Articles
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AGREEMENT
Between the Members of the
SEAMEN'S
Loyal Standard
ASSOCIATION,
OF THE PORTS OF
Bridlington, Scarborough,
And Whitby,
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North Shields:

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1825.

significance in 1825.

"It was reported in newspapers across the country and discussed at the highest political level.

"The people of Sunderland at the time were outraged, believing that innocent people had been murdered by soldiers.

"The sailors' union purposely referred to the event as the 'ever to be

remembered 3rd August' to indicate the magnitude of what happened on that day in Sunderland.

"The 1825 North Sands Massacre should never have been forgotten, but sadly, over time, it has. The people killed, and the other strikers, were fighting for a decent wage and a dignified life," he said.

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RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE POLITICAL FUND

In accordance with section 84A of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 RMT is obliged to inform, on an annual basis, any member who joined the union on or after 1 March 2018 that they are entitled to choose to withdraw their contributions to the Union's Political Fund if they submit a

withdrawal notice. For the avoidance of doubt, the Union does not recommend that you do this as the money it receives from the Political Fund is vital to much of the campaigning work it undertakes. However, notwithstanding the Union's position, if you wish to withdraw your contribution to the

Political Fund you need to submit a withdrawal notice making clear you no longer wish to contribute to the Union's Political Fund. In this notice you should set out who you are, what your address is and what branch you are in. You can submit the withdrawal notice either by delivering it by hand to the Union's head office

or your branch office or by emailing info@rmt.org. The Union will then action your request. You can also ask us to provide you with an electronic version of a withdrawal notice for you to complete to facilitate your withdrawal and we will do this immediately if you email info@rmt.org.