

## Tribute to Caroline Martyn

All texts are from contemporary material, mainly *Hebden Bridge Times 1896* and *Life and Letters of Caroline Martyn*.

Four voices: Narrator 1; Narrator 2; Caroline Martyn; Man at rally

**Narrator 1:** The *Hebden Bridge Times*, May 29<sup>th</sup> 1896, page 8. “Whit Monday is a red-letter day for the socialists, and demonstrations take place on this day all over the country. The Yorkshire Independent Labour Party also observe this custom and this year they held their annual demonstration at Hardcastle Crag. Glorious weather prevailed and the gathering was a monster one in every particular. Trips were run from all parts of Yorkshire and large contingents came from Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield, Dewsbury, Liversedge, Brighouse, Sowerby Bridge...

**Narrator 2** (*breaks in*): “The valley throughout the day sounded with mirth.”

**Narrator 1:** “..., Keighley, Cleckheaton, Horbury, Heckmondwyke, Honley, Thornhill and Meltham and also from several towns in Lancashire, notably Todmorden, Rochdale, Oldham and Burnley. It is computed that during the day the Crag were visited by fully 12,000 persons.”

**Narrator 2:** “Many no doubt were attracted to the meeting simply out of curiosity, but the majority were enthusiastic socialists and made their presence felt in no small degree. A musical programme preceded the speaking, the artists being members of the Halifax, Bradford, Leeds and Keighley Clarion Vocal Unions and a quartette party from Golcar.”

**Narrator 1:** “The singing was loudly cheered. The chief speakers were Miss C Martyn and Mr J Keir Hardie, both well-known exponents of the Labour movement.”

**Narrator 2:** Keir Hardie, born 1856, died 1915. Celebrated socialist, instrumental in founding of the Labour Party. Caroline Martyn, born at Lincoln on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1867. Died Dundee, July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1896, aged 29.

(*gets out old book*) Extracts from *Life and Letters of Caroline Martyn*, published by Labour Leader Publishing Department, 1898: I have had a very busy time. Two meetings on Sunday. Monday, immediately after tea...

**Caroline Martyn:** (*CM herself comes forward, to take over*) ...Monday, immediately after tea, a big social at which all delegates are expected to show up. Tuesday a meeting at Consett. Wednesday, I presided over a children’s tea and meeting, then had to rush off to rather a large grown-up meeting to speak. Tonight I go to talk to the miners at Burradon Colliery. It was a serious and solemn function, but we had some good laughs.

**Man at rally:** I knew nothing of the subject of socialism, and did not care to learn much about it, but for curiosity’s sake I took my seat on a tree-stump that Friday evening, when Caroline Martyn came to Eagley to speak in the open air.

**CM:** The Bakers’ Union have commissioned me to write a pamphlet for them.

The tour in Scotland has been fine and invigorating, such huge meetings and so much enthusiasm.

**Man at rally:** In company with some two or three hundred people I listened to an exposition of Socialistic principles. My wonder at what seemed to me the intrepidity and courage of a young and defenceless woman grew and changed to amazement at myself that I had never seen these things in this light before.

**CM:** Edinburgh want me for another week, Ayrshire Federation ditto, Dundee the same, Paisley want a week during the autumn if possible. In Aberdeen they tell me I am the only woman speaker who has been a real success. I am afraid you will think me very conceited to repeat all this, but I am glad and proud.

**Man at rally:** She had spoken as no woman spoke before in my hearing. Scales fell from my eyes, and ere long I was a socialist.

**CM:** Where do I go after Colne Valley? Manchester wants a Sunday, and I could give the other places that want me a weekday each. Barrow-in-Furness a day or two, Workington, Whitehaven, Carlisle...

**Man at rally:** Though I have never had the good fortune to hear Caroline again, I have found it to be a cause for thankfulness that once I heard her.

**CM :** I have had a fine time. Three days running I had six meetings each day, then ten, then eleven. Rochdale, fine meetings. Good spirit. Bolton, very good prospects.

**Narrator 1:** Hebden Bridge Times, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1896. "Miss C Martyn had an enthusiastic reception. She said it was very delightful to be present that afternoon to wish them all God speed."

**Narrator 2:** Extracts from Life and Letters of Caroline Martyn: "During this month of May, Caroline Martyn attended a demonstration at Hardcastle Craggs, and the following description is given of her at that time: Then from a dais-like, heath-clad rock, around which the choristers had stood, arose our Carrie Martyn. Truly no Diana of old was ever more godlike than she, as she stood before the background of waving green, and with the wind gently moving her flowing gown into graceful folds, spoke from her noble heart words of burning fervour and truth, which it were well that the whole world upon that day should hear and heed."

**Narrator 1:** "She saw for the world at large a glad and glorious future in the fact that men and women were together taking up the socialist movement and freeing mankind from the wrongs that had so long weighed upon them. The question was, what were they going to do with regard to the future?"

**Narrator 2:** On Monday July 13<sup>th</sup>, Caroline went to Dundee.

**CM:** I do not know if it is the weather, which is close and gloomy or what but I have been feeling very queer the last few days. I have not been quite up to the mark for a week or two.

**Narrator 2:** She was already breaking up in health, but she said little about it for fear of making her own people unnecessarily anxious.

**CM:** Last night, after my speech, I took the names for 19 new members of the Textile Workers' Union myself, and there were two or three others taking names also. I hope I shall soon be all right. It is very hard to speak in public when you feel faint and ill.

**Narrator 2:** On the night that this letter was written Caroline Martyn lectured for the last time. She was far from well, and at the close of her lecture she fainted. Somehow, though we all felt anxious, we could not realise her danger. We thought she would pull through this as she had pulled through so many times before. On Wednesday afternoon there was a telegram requesting Caroline's mother to go at once. She was met by some of the comrades, who took her to the house in which Caroline lay dying. At four o'clock in the afternoon of Friday July 24<sup>th</sup> 1896 the body of Caroline Martyn was laid to rest.

Caroline Martyn was gone, and a gap was made in the army of the world's workers which it seemed would be impossible to fill.

[*pause*]

**Narrator 1:** Hebden Bridge Times, Whitsun rally, May 1896. Miss C Martyn had an enthusiastic reception. She said it was very delightful to be present. She saw for the world at large a glad and glorious future...

**CM:** (*takes over*) She saw for the world at large a glad and glorious future in the fact that men and women were together taking up the socialist movement and freeing mankind from the wrongs that had so long weighed upon them.

The question was, what were they going to do with regard to the future?

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(This text written by [Andrew Bibby](#), 2002)