

# Luddite Play: ( Last rites of the Luddites ) (2011)

## **PARTS:**

### **Tellers:**

Teller 1  
Teller 2

### **Luddites:**

Ned Ludd  
George Mellor  
William Thorpe  
Benjamin Walker  
Thomas Smith

### **Masters/Mill Owners:**

Enoch Taylor  
William Horsfall

### **The Crowd:**

Anyone with no role wishing to take part

### **Writer & Director:**

Chris Carter

### **Teller 1**

[Enters ringing a bell]

Oh yea, oh yea, oh yea!

The time has come to tell a tale  
Of terrible times in this fair vale.  
In 1812 – hunger stalked our streets  
Men gathered in Inns for secret meets.  
Skilled croppers, who were once “the cream”  
Were losing their jobs to the new machine.  
‘Shearing Frames’ did the job of ten skilled men  
And croppers feared they would never work again!

### **Teller 2:**

Many brave croppers – aggrieved and sore  
Would take up arms and turn to war.  
These were the “Luddites” of the highest degree  
Named after Ned Ludd – of Leicester County.  
So come forward brave lads and tell your story,  
Was this a time of shame - or a time of glory?

[Luddites charge in fiercely carrying Enoch’s Hammers (and hatchets/pikes/guns/cropping shears??)]

[Shouting loudly .....**Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaargh!!!**]

**Crowd:** Hurray / Hurray for the Luddites / Hurray!

**George Mellor:** I am George Mellor – ‘General Ludd’ in these parts  
I lead many men and I have their hearts.  
For they’ve sworn a secret oath that makes it plain  
If they should turn traitor they shall be slain!

**William Thorpe:** I am William Thorpe.  
A Cropper Lad by trade I am  
And Mellor’s loyal right hand man.  
‘Tis the masters and the new machines I do curse  
And wish upon them ruin and much, much worse.  
I will smash these machines  
Till the way to hell narrows.  
And if I fail in this  
I will hang from the gallows!

**Benjamin Walker:** I am Benjamin Walker and I ‘aint no talker!  
Seven years apprenticeship we have all served  
To learn our skilled trade and have not erred  
From serving our masters to earn a just wage  
Until now! – and this new mechanical age!  
I do not care to face poverty and shame  
And hope I never disgrace my family’s good name.

**Thomas Smith:** I am Thomas Smith.  
Like these fellows I am a young cropper man  
I care not for war but will do all I can  
To fight off redundancy and its’ humiliation  
For unemployment means poverty  
And certain starvation.  
We are just young men – aged 22 to 25  
I’ll hang if it comes to it  
- But I’d rather stay alive!

**George Mellor:** Some brave words lads, though some rather tame  
Let’s hope your deeds shall not be so lame.  
For we’ll find out now, as never before  
As we take up arms and march into war. AWAY!

[They storm out shouting]

**George Mellor:** Enoch hath made them and Enoch shall break them!

**All Luddites:** Aye! Enoch hath made them and Enoch shall break them!  
.....**Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaargh!**

**Crowd:** Good on you lads / Hurray for the Luddites / Power to your elbow! Hurray!

**Teller 1:** Shearing frames smashed at Marsh, Linfit, Slawit, Golcar, Hoyle House. Lockwood, South Crosland, Holmfirth, Honley and Clough.

**Teller 2:** Mill owners and the authorities cry "Enough is enough!"  
Hundreds of militia now garrisoned on Marsden's hills  
And occupy the valley's Inns and Mills.

**Teller 1:** "Machine breaking" made a capital offence.

**Teller 2:** Luddites now face the death sentence!

**Teller 1:** But where are the mill owners and the masters in all this?  
Do you dare to come forward? .....but beware the hiss!

**William Horsfall:** [*spoken together, loudly and with authority*]

**And**

**Enoch Taylor:** We are two masters and mill owners that be  
And we'll not give in to this treachery!

**Crowd:** Loud booing and hissing.

**Enoch Taylor:** I am Enoch Taylor from Marsden.  
A Master Blacksmith who makes  
The Enoch's Hammers  
And also the new Shearing Frames  
To teach these croppers some manners!  
That's why these rebels cry:  
"Enoch hath made them and Enoch shall break them!"  
But progress is progress  
And we shall not be shaken.  
Nothing can stop this industrial revolution  
And I will surely grow rich from my contribution!

**Crowd:** Loud booing and hissing

**William Horsfall:** I am William Horsfall of Marsden's Ottiwells Mill  
I have 400 workers and grow fat from the thrill  
Of tracking down every cropper who follows Ned Ludd  
For I swear to ride up to my saddle girth  
- In Luddite blood!!  
These haughty croppers – once so over- paid  
Thought they were the elite of the textile trade.  
How the mighty have fallen! - and now it's only proper  
That they lose out to progress and come a right cropper!!!

**Crowd:** Even louder booing and hissing from the crowd

**Enoch Taylor:** Come let's get away from this baying riot.

**William Horsfall:** Aye, we have militia and cannon now  
To keep this ignorant scum quiet!

*[They leave in haste]*

**Crowd:** Very loud booing and hissing: Bloody tyrants / Be off with you /  
Go to hell / Boo!

**Teller 1:** The luddites now assembled from Huddersfield, Halifax, Spen  
Valley and Leeds.  
And thought a mass attack on Rawfolds Mill  
Would satisfy their needs.

**Teller 2:** But the militia were ready to repel their attack  
Two Luddites were killed and ended up in a sack.  
Many more were wounded or maimed for life.  
The streets ran with blood and misery was rife.

*[The Luddites return – some wearing blood-soaked bandages. They run/limp in and look nervously over their shoulders, fearing the chase]*

**William Thorpe:** Rawfolds Mill was like a ruddy fortress!  
Our Enoch's hammers failed to break down the door!

**Benjamin Walker:** Aye, and there were battlements for soldiers on the upper floor  
So they could fire down upon us and do us sore!

**William Thorpe:** Spiked metal rollers were rolled down the stairs  
To shred our brave men!

**Benjamin Walker:** And tubs of vitriol to kill them again!

**Thomas Smith:** The tide has turned – it has turned very sour  
We must do “like-for- like” to win back the hour.

**George Mellor:** Aye! Now they have turned to murder  
We must now do the same.  
'Tis not machines we must break  
'Tis mill owners we must maim.  
Now listen well lads and listen real good  
Horsfall said he'd ride up to his saddle girth  
In our precious blood!  
And with a name like 'Horsfall' - I know it's pathetic  
But if he should fall from his horse  
It would be – kind of prophetic!!

**Crowd:** *[One of the 'crowd' rushes in to whisper in his ear]*

**George Mellor:** Ha! He's riding now to Marsden from Huddersfield market  
We must move fast to ambush our target! Come!

*[Led by Mellor they run around in circles many times as if on a chase. Then Mellor stops and says: "Shhhhhhh!" and they crouch down with guns drawn...and wait!*

*Then we hear the sounds of 'clip, clop, clip, clop' (two half coconut shells banged together) getting closer as Horsfall approaches on his horse]*

**George Mellor:** Halt! I challenge you. Hold fast and stand still!  
Are you William Horsfall of Marsden's Ottiwells Mill?

**William Horsfall:** Whoa Bess!!  
I am William Horsfall, riding free on Crosland Moor  
And who are you sir?  
- A haughty Luddite - or one of the thieving poor?

**George Mellor:** We are noble Luddites sir, named after the great Ned Ludd  
And we are left with no option than to spill your bloated blood!!

*[Horsfall reaches into his jacket]*

**Thomas Smith:** He's going for his gun!

**George Mellor:** Fire!

*[Gun shots ring out and Horsfall falls from his horse]]*

**George Mellor:** Come me lads - lets split up and away  
We've done our terrible deed this fateful day!

*[They spilt up and leave quietly]*

**Teller 1:** Now came the time of reckoning  
A time of retribution.  
When men would be tortured  
And hanged for this revolution.  
The murder of William Horsfall  
Badly shook the whole community.  
They lost popular support  
And therefore their immunity.

**Teller 2:** The authorities - now so worried and alarmed  
Offered informers a MASSIVE £2000 reward!!

**Teller 1:** That's half a million today folks!!

**Teller 2:** And promised they would be unharmed.

**Teller 1:** Come forward **INFORMER Benjamin Walker !**

**Crowd:** Loud booing and hissing as he shuffles in nervously.

**Teller 1:** You turned Kings Evidence and DID turn "talker!"  
Your sacred oath was just a waste of good breath  
Your evidence sent your 'fellows'- Mellor, Thorpe and Smith  
To their cruel death.

Oh-I smell a rat. A stinking, putrid smell  
 May you be cursed by all - and rot in hell!!! Away!

*[Teller dismisses him with a flick of the hand and he skulks away]*

**Crowd:** **Very** loud booing and hissing: Traitor / turncoat/ snitch / rat /  
 You'll be shunned forever / We'll get you!

**Teller 2:** Come forward **George Mellor, William Thorpe and Thomas Smith.**

*[They enter holding a noose around their necks – to cheers from the crowd]*

**Crowd:** Hurray for our heroes / Hurray for the Luddites / Hurray!

**Teller 2:** You are the first of seventeen Luddites to be hanged at York  
 And the only ones to also be dissected like cheap pork!!!  
 Your crime of murder being deemed so extreme and severe.  
 - May God bless you and keep you  
 For we shall remember you dear!

*[They doff their hats, say "Thank you" and depart with dignity]*

**Crowd:** Hurray / Good on ya lads / Rest in peace and God bless you/  
 You will be remembered forever / Hurray!

**Teller 1:** This time in 1812 - nearly 200 years ago  
 Was a time of great conflict and a time of great sorrow.  
 When our humble valleys became a war zone  
 And proud men fought to protect their jobs and their home.  
 A time when good men were driven by desperation  
 A time of great hardship - beyond our imagination!  
 Remember the Luddites well and keep them in your heart  
 For as this play is now ended - it is time to depart!

**Teller 2:** Ah! But wait. Hang on! - there is still something hidden!  
 Where is Ned Ludd? - in whose name they were bidden  
 To rise up in revolt to smash, murder and maim!  
 Who is this great leader and man of great fame?

[**Extra 'crowd'** people step forward and reveal one by one: " I am Ned Ludd. I am Ned Ludd, No I am Ned Ludd. I am Ned Ludd 'tis I, I am Ned Ludd - me, I am Ned Ludd, No it's me I am Ned Ludd, I am Ned Ludd! etc, etc]

**Teller 2:** [says very loudly & crossly]

**STOP!** Oh me, Oh my!...What's all this **FUSS ?!!**  
We're not playing bloody **SPARTICUS!!!.... Away!**

[She dismisses them with a flick of the hand and they retreat into the crowd– as Ned Ludd steps forward crossly, with hands on hips]

**Ned Ludd:** [*shrieks very loudly and angrily at the top of his voice*]

**I AM NED LUDD !!**

**Crowd:** Gasps! – What? / It can't be / Surely not!

**Teller 2:** What's this? But you are just a young boy!  
How could you lead men to kill and destroy?

**Ned Ludd:** I am just a boy!  
Aged seven and three quarters.  
It's not my fault  
I didn't call for these slaughters!  
I was an apprentice  
To learn frame-work knitting.  
But I was lazy and slow.  
So my master  
Gave me a whipping!!

**Teller 2:** So what did you do?

**Ned Ludd:** That made me so angry!  
'Cos I wasn't to blame  
So I got me a hammer  
And smashed up that  
Stupid stocking frame!

**Teller 2:** What happened then Ned Ludd?

**Ned Ludd:** Word of my deed  
 Spread around really fast  
 And Nottingham croppers  
 Though it would be a blast  
 To call themselves Luddites  
 And act in my name  
 When they also took up hammers  
 To break the new shear frame!

**Crowd:** Hurray for young Ned Ludd / Good on ya lad / Hurray!

**Teller 1:** Thank You Ned Ludd.  
 So you see good people - this tale is now told  
 About a young boy, so cheeky and bold.  
 That croppers decided to copy his action  
 And call themselves "Luddites"!  
 To form a new faction.  
 In his name they did riot and spill blood  
 And gave their lives to save their livelihood.  
 Now as we leave this sad tale and say farewell  
 We'll sing 'The Cropper Lads' song  
 To remember them well.

*[Members of the cast assemble quickly to sing 'The Cropper Lads' song and march out together slowly during the last verse and chorus]*

### **END**

The play: 'Luddite Play (Last Rites of The Luddites)' has been written entirely by **Christopher Mark Carter**

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## THE CROPPER LADS SONG

Come, cropper lads of high renown  
 Who love to drink good ale that's brown,  
 And strike each haughty tyrant down  
 With hatchet, pike and gun!

### *Chorus*

Oh, the cropper lads for me,  
 And gallant lads they be,  
 Who with lusty stroke  
 The shear frames broke,  
 The cropper lads for me.

What though the specials still advance,  
 And soldiers nightly round us prance,  
 The cropper lads still lead the dance,  
 With hatchet, pike and gun.

### *Chorus*

And night by night when all is still,  
 And the moon is hid behind the hill,  
 We forward march to do our will  
 With hatchet, pike and gun.

### *Chorus*

Great Enoch still shall lead the van,  
 Stop him who dare! Stop him, who can!  
 Press forward every gallant man,  
 With hatchet, pike and gun.

### *Chorus*

**Note:** The author of the play is not the author of the above Cropper Lads Song.