

‘Let the obloquy and the consequences that would attach to her be what they might...’

# Mary Ann Walker in her own words

Mary Ann Walker first attended a meeting of the City of London Female Chartist Association to listen rather than to participate. But she spoke out when a member of the Complete Suffrage Union argued that women were unfit to take part in politics.

Her words then, and in subsequent weeks when she began to lecture on the Charter, suggest she already had experience of public life. But little is known of Mary Ann Walker’s life beyond these few lectures, and within three months she had disappeared once again into obscurity. Although there is no verbatim record of her lectures, reports from the Chartist *Evening Star* provide a detailed account of what she had to say, and are as close as is now possible to her own words.

## CONTENTS

Controversy at the launch of the  
Female Chartist Association  
(17 October 1842) ... 2

Speech at the City Chartist Hall in  
response to reports in the *Times*  
(24 October 1842) ... 4

Letter to a French admirer: ‘the time  
has not yet arrived’ when women  
should claim the vote  
(22 October 1842)... 7

Lecture at the National Association Hall  
(5 December 1842)... 9

Bristol Lectures (3 January 1843) ... 16

Notes and sources, author details ... 19



The only known image of Mary Ann Walker is an unflattering John Leech caricature for *Punch*.

‘She called on her “Sister Democrats” to “come out;” and to stand up for the Charter, “name and all”’

A public meeting to launch the City of London Female Chartist Association took place in the City Charter Hall at 55 Old Bailey on 17 October 1842. It had barely begun before a Mr Cohen (who had at previous Chartist meetings declared himself a supporter of the Complete Suffrage Union), opened hostilities with the observation that ‘woman, “physically” considered, was not fitted for the exercise of political rights,’ and urged the mothers present ‘to return to their place ‘at the domestic hearth’. The Female Chartist Association already had a secretary, 22-year-old Susanna Inge, and she was first to respond. But Mary Ann Walker, who was in the audience, also spoke. It is noteworthy that the speech below was delivered by Mary Ann Walker without preparation or notes.

## FEMALE CHARTIST ASSOCIATION

Miss Mary Ann Walker, a young lady of prepossessing appearance, rose to “order” and said she was astonished at the rudeness of Mr Cohen’s question. (Hear, hear, laughter. And cries from the men of “Give it to him!”) “If,” said Mr Cohen, “she were in Parliament as representative of a borough, and that a husband or lover were to endeavour by his influence over her affections to sway her vote on any grave political question. How could she resist him?” A husband or lover endeavour to sway *her* vote! She (Miss Walker) repudiated with disgust and indignation such an idea. (Hear, and cheers.) Yes, she would repudiate with scorn, the contemptible scoundrel, be he “husband” or be he “lover,” who would dare attempt to turn her aside from the strict path of duty; for if he would basely mislead her on one point – and that all-important one – he would mislead her in all others. (Loud and enthusiastic cheers from the men, and cries of “hear, hear” from the women.) Woman was, at the present moment, emphatically called upon to “come out.” (Hear, hear.) Looking at the awful state of things that was passing in the North of England, where that “*partisan*” (Tory) Judge Lord Abinger (hisses), and a recreant, ignorant, prejudiced, and basely compliant “provincial” jury, were trying, condemning, and sentencing to banishment from their native land, or else to imprisonment in dismal and pestiferous dungeons, the people’s fellow sister and brother democrats, for no other offence than standing up for their “political rights,” and for bread for themselves, their starving wives, and “little ones.” (Shame, shame). Where such doings, she repeated,

*Evening Star,*  
19 October 1842, P3

were taking place, it was high time for woman to come out, and raise her voice against them. It was clear from his conduct, that there was “one law for the rich, and another for the poor,” in this ill-fated country. (Hear, hear, hear, and cries of “Shame.”) When she thought of the sufferings of her fellow sister and brother “democrats,” her heart bled; and so filled was her mind with the sense of those sufferings, and that nothing but “pure, unmitigated Chartism” could redress their grievances, she that morning awoke in tears from a dream over the former, and of longing anxiety for “the People’s Charter.” (Loud cheers.) The wrongs inflicted on the people, and on her devoted country, by a corrupt and bigoted, mean and selfish aristocracy, had made her, within the last two years, a thorough “democrat.” (Renewed cheers.) And so convinced was she that nothing but the large amalgamation of sound democratic principles with the institutions of the State could save the country from ruin, that she seized on every opportunity to promulgate those principles. (Hear, cries of “Bravo! Miss Walker,” and applause.) The talented young lady then went on to state, that in carrying out those principles (for which she was prepared to lay down her life), she went in the other day to her butcher’s and baker’s, and on their demurring to put up a bill for her respecting “Chartist! Meetings, threatened to withdraw her customer from them, and so brought them to a sense of their duty. (Laughter.) The bills were consequently put up. (Great cheering.) Much power, she would add, remained in the hands of the women, to advance “the Charter” in this way; for they all knew that it was not the men who usually went to purchase the bread and the meat, the milk, the cheese, the butter, and all those sort of things. (Hear and laughter.) She therefore called on her “Sister Democrats” to “come out;” and, regardless of any shafts of ridicule which might be pointed at, or attacks made on them, for ungrammatical language, to stand up for the Charter, “name and all,” (Cheers) and she promised them, as an encouragement, that if it were only out of curiosity to hear “a woman” speak the “young men” would come out and speak to them. (Loud and long-continued cheers, amidst which Miss Walker, who spoke with great spirit and facility, “suited the action to the word,” resumed her seat.

‘She admitted her speech had not been written out for her by “connoisseurs” of such nice and refined taste as “Bobby Peel” and “the Duke of Wellington.”’

After the *Evening Star* reported on the meeting of 17 October, the *Times* picked up the story and ran a hostile leader article which in turn was repeated in newspapers all over the country. Mary Ann Walker was back in the City Charter Hall the following Monday (24 October) to respond a few days later, returning the paper’s mockery in equal measure. She would also make wider political points about the hardship faced by women workers, whose 5d a day for making clothes on government contracts she contrasted with the £100,000 a year pension granted to the dowager queen Adelaide, widow of King William IV.

## MISS MARY ANNE WALKER’S SPEECH

Miss Walker observed that she had a few words to say to the meeting. (Hear, hear.) “Wonders,” she continued, “would never cease.” (Laughter.) Who would have thought that Mr Cohen, Miss Susannah Inge, and herself, (Miss Mary Anne Walker) would have been so far distinguished as to be made the subjects of a leading article in the *Times* – the *Times*! – yes, the *Times* indeed! (Laughter.) Mr Cohen had brought all this upon them by his question – “Suppose ladies were in the House of Commons for a Parliamentary borough, and that a fascinating sprig of Tory aristocracy were to try to sway their votes through an influence over their affections, how could they resist?” (Laughter from the gentlemen, and tittering among the ladies.) How ridiculous that was (A laugh). She (Miss Walker) would tell Mr Cohen, and the *Times*, too, that they had got a nice little point in the Charter, which would act as an antidote to that sort of “influence over their affections. They would be discharged from their situation of members at the end of twelve months, should they weakly prove “unworthy of their trust,” and thrown “on the wide world, out of place,” and “without a character from their last masters and mistresses.” (Laughter and much applause from the gentlemen.) The *Times*, and the other portions of the press which had noticed them, had given them great popularity, and at a much safer and cheaper rate than they could hope to attain it, had they flung themselves from “the top of the Monument,” or forced themselves into “the Queen’s palace.” (Cheers and laughter.) They were much indebted to the *Times* for this notoriety. She now stood there to assert that she would not be deterred from the pursuit of the objects of the People’s Charter by the attacks in the *Times*, and

*Evening Star*,  
26 October 1842, P3

that she, and those females who acted with her, would go on in their course. (Hear, hear, and cries of Bravo.) And she hoped that husbands would bring their wives and daughters to the meeting of the female Chartists. (Hear, hear, from the ladies, and cheers mingled with laughter from the gentlemen.) At those Chartist meetings the wives and daughters would hear good instruction, and she (Miss Walker) would tell the *Times* that they might hear reason and sound political wisdom from the lips of woman, and even from the daughter of a working man. (Hear, hear, and cheers.) For the advancement of their glorious cause – “The People’s Charter – “Love and Union,” should go “hand in hand.” (Hear, hear, from the young men.) She called upon the women, then, to attend those Chartist meetings; and she assured “the mothers,” that by so attending they would, at least, learn and know where to send their children to school, after which they would no longer send them to the “national hum-bugs.” (Hear, hear, and laughter.) The *Times* had threatened to “follow in her (Miss Mary Anne Walker’s) footsteps.” (A laugh.) But she cared nothing for its threats, and as for its “following in her footsteps,” it would thereby hear from her the principles of truth. (Cheers, cries of “Bravo! Miss Walker,” and hear.) The phrase “contemptible scoundrel,” which she had said she should regard as the creature who would attempt to influence her vote by any sway which she might possess over her affections, and which she has also applied to that immaculate Judge, Lord Abinger (laughter from all parts of the house) had given much uneasiness to the *Times*, who had harped on its “discordancy.” (Laughter.) She admitted her speech had not been written out for her by “connoisseurs” of such nice and refined taste as “Bobby Peel” and “the Duke of Wellington.” (Much laughter.) The *Times* was also very fastidious in its allusions to their meeting in the “Old Bailey,” a place, however, where reporters of the public press not unfrequently figure; but then, it was “within the strong walls” over the way (in allusion to “Newgate”), where, fortunately, the “Female Chartists” have not yet figured. She (Miss Walker) came out alive to the abuses of her country; and she was sure the *Times* would not differ from her when she said, that it was shameful, that while Englishwomen were receiving but “five pence” the pair, for the making of policemen’s “trowsers,” a German woman was receiving “one hundred thousand a year,” wrung in taxes from the earnings of the hard working men of England. (Hear, hear, cheers, and laughter from the men, and sly glances from the ladies.) It would take, she (Miss Mary Anne Walker) would tell the *Times*, “*four millions, eight hundred policemen’s trowsers*,” at “fivepence the pair,” to pay this German woman’s pension. (Laughter from the gentlemen and deep “sensation” among the ladies.) She would further ask the *Times* if it were not a shame that this enormous pension should be given, while Englishwomen were also receiving but “ninepence the dozen” for making “shirts?” (Hear, hear, and sensation.) She assured

the *Times* that its “leading article” had done her the greatest good (Hear, hear, and laughter) and had made her so popular, that numbers of people had been crowding in on her, and asking her, “Did you see the *Times* – did you see the *Times*?” Why it calls you “Hen Chartists.” (Much laughter). She assured them that she had seen that paper, and had got plenty of them, which poured in on her from friends; and if there were any reporters present they might take that up for the benefit of the *Times* also. (Great cheering, laughter, and cries of “Bravo!” “Excellent!” “Well said!” “Hear, hear,” and laughter, amidst which Miss Mary Ann Walker resumed her seat, many persons at the same time eagerly pressing forward to the platform to shake hands with her.)

‘While I hold woman to be entitled by nature to use the franchise ... I think that the time has not yet arrived when it would be prudent for her to claim it.’

Among the letters that poured in to the Charter Association Hall after newspapers far and wide reported the existence of a Female Chartist Association was one from Messier de Clarge, ‘a distinguished member of the literati of Paris. M De Clarge wrote in complimentary terms, addressing his letter to ‘The Lady Chartists of Great Britain, and to Miss Mary Ann Walker in Particular’, and promised to send a copy of his as yet unpublished book. The text of Mary Ann Walker’s reply, read out and approved at a meeting on 22 November 1842, is given below. It is notable in that Mary Ann Walker writes that, though supporting in principle women’s right to the vote, she believes that women should first be given an education in ‘truth, reason and morality’.

## **MISS MARY ANN WALKER AND THE “TIMES”**

“Charter Association Hall, Old Bailey, London Nov. 22, 1842

“Sir, - I am commissioned by the Association of Female Chartists of London, to acknowledge the receipt of your polite letter, offering to present them with a copy of an unpublished work, entitled ‘The Rights and Privileges of Women.’ They will have great pleasure in accepting the work, and entertain no doubt that it deserves the commendation which you say has already been bestowed on it. It may be sent to the above address.

“The Female Chartists return thanks for your sympathy in the cause with which they have connected themselves, and I beg to express my deep obligation for the handsome manner in which you mention my name and allude to my services.

“In conclusion, allow me, Sir, to state my own opinions respecting the rights and privileges of my sex – when I say my own opinions, I think I may include the opinions of those of my sex with whom I am now acting in furtherance of the rights of our common country.

“While I hold woman to be entitled by nature to use the franchise with as much credit to the state as many, I think that the time has not yet arrived when it would be prudent for her to claim it. I think, Sir, that education must have full scope – that the present darkness must be removed – in fact, the ignorance which woman has ever been made by man’s laws the

*Evening Star,*  
23 November 1842, P2

victim of, must be dispelled, before she should lay claim to the right of franchise. An education, Sir, based upon truth, reason, and morality, instead of the present weak and puerile system, by which the mind and conduct of woman is cribbed, cabined, and confined, and her noble capabilities laid prostrate, must be instituted; and then, and not till then, am I of opinion that she would be qualified to use her powers in the service of her country.

“With these few remarks, and again returning you many sincere thanks on the part of my country-women,

“I remain, kind Sir, yours respectfully,

Mary Ann Walker



‘How was it that the women of England were reduced to make shirts for one penny each, and had to find thread out of that?’

Mary Ann Walker had made few public speeches, but many people were sufficiently intrigued by these to want to see her. The City Chartist Hall, however, could hold no more than a couple of hundred people, so a bigger venue was needed for her first ‘lecture’. The text below reproduces the *Evening Star*’s report of Mary Ann Walker’s lecture in the ‘spacious and elegant hall’ of the National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People at on the evening of Monday 5 December 1842. The paper reported that the hall was crowded, and that soon after the advertised start time of eight o’clock, the audience ‘began to manifest impatience to hear Miss Walker’, by loudly stamping on the floor. ‘Among the mass of persons present, was a large proportion of very elegantly dressed ladies, many of whom were of the superior classes.’ Ten minutes after the advertised start time, there was spontaneous applause as Mary Ann Walker, accompanied by her friends, advanced up the body of the hall towards the platform, to an enthusiastic welcome.

Called to the chair, William Balls, a prominent member of the City of London Charter Association, kept his introduction brief. It was greeted by ‘long and continued cheers’.

## MISS MARY ANN WALKER ON THE PEOPLE’S CHARTER

Miss Mary Ann Walker rose and said she deeply felt the difficulty of her situation on that evening, but feeling, at the same time, most deeply on the subject of her great and lovely country’s wrongs, and of her fellow-countrymen’s and women’s sufferings, she had no apology to make for presenting herself before the meeting that evening. It was a bold thing, she admitted, for women to step out of her retirement; and of course there would be always found persons who would put foul constructions on her motives in order to deter and throw her back. (Hear, hear.) And if there were any in that assembly who asked why she (Miss Walker) came out, to him she answered, “She came there at her country’s call.” If the human misery which afflicted the people of this great country was beyond the power of man to control – if it was the ordination of Providence,

William Lovett took a lease on the former Gate Street Methodist Chapel at 242 High Holborn in January 1842, and fitted it out for use by the National Association. Able to hold 2,000 people, it was used for lectures, meetings, and later as a school. It closed in 1849, and was acquired by the proprietor of the Six Cans and Punch Bowl tavern next door. It reopened in 1859 as Weston’s Music Hall, becoming the Holborn Empire in 1906, but was destroyed in the Blitz in July 1941. An office building now stands on the site.

*Evening Star*,  
6 December 1842, P2-3

then would it be man's duty to submit; but when such was not the case, it was time. She would say, that man aroused himself, and seek to resist its cause (Hear, hear, and loud cheers.) There never was a time when England possessed such abundance as at present. (Hear.) How was it, then, she would ask, that two-thirds of the population were, in the face of such a fact, without food? (Hear, hear, hear.) How was it that they should not take up a paper, but they were shocked and startled to read some frightful and affecting suicide? (Hear, hear.) How was it that but a few days ago, a young girl of about fourteen years of age, committed suicide? And, be it remembered, she was of a respectable family, but had disoblged her father – how, but because she could not get employment. How was it that the women of England were reduced to make shirts for one penny each, and had to find thread out of that? (Indignant cries of “Shame!” from all parts of the hall.) How was it that Mr. Comyn, a surgeon, for whose character she (Miss Walker) entertained the highest respect, had recently called a meeting on behalf of those poor shirt makers? How came he to know of their circumstances and most deplorable condition? Alas! through having been called in to one of them, who, to put an end to her miseries, had taken *vitriol*. (Deep sensation.) That poor creature had worked for *sixteen hours a day for sixpence*! (Horror, accompanied by cries of “Shame, shame!” pervaded and ran through the meeting.) This had led to that gentleman saying, those poor shirt-makers “would be satisfied with one penny more.” In that, she (Miss Walker) did not agree with him. Those poor creatures should have a fair remunerative price for their labour. (Hear, hear, and applause.) She inquired at a shop-keeper's, an employer in this way, on the subject of the “penny a shirt” remuneration, and was informed by him that the taxes obliged him to give thus little, and she then set herself to work to learn who gained by those taxes. “*The Black List*,” which she held in her hand, would answer. (Hear, hear.) And she would advise every poor, every working man, to possess himself of that list. First, then, let them take the income of 470,000*l* a year, or 1,287*l* 12*s* a day. Then there was the Duke of Cumberland, now King of Hanover, with Kew Palace. (Groans). She (Miss Walker) would ask, why should they keep *him*, and give him one and twenty thousand a year, or 57*l* 10*s* per day. (Hear, hear, groans for his “Hanovarian” Majesty, and cheers for Miss Walker.) Then there was another King pensioned on them, Leopold of Saxe Cobourg, (now King of the Belgians,) with Claremont Palace; why was he receiving 50,000*l* a-year from this oppressed country, (Hear, hear.) Why, she would further ask, were the people of this country ground down as they were, taxed to keep a Queen Dowager – Queen Adelaide? who, besides the Royal Manor and Palace of Hampton Court, the Park and Domains of Bushy, also Marlborough House, in Pall Mall, two parks and three Royal Palaces, drew from the taxes of England 100,000*l* a year, or 274*l* per day

(Shame! Shame!) Why was that? And she (Miss Walker) would ask how “an old lady” could spend it. (“Hear, hear,” and cheers.)

A voice – she gives it in charity! (Commotion.)

She (Miss Walker) very much questioned that. How, then, she would ask, could that “old lady” spend 274*l* a-day, from the time she gets up till the time she goes to bed? (Laughter in the meeting, and much commotion among a section of *Tories* in the gallery on the right.) She (Miss Walker) did not quarrel with the Queen Dowager for what she got; but she thought that a yearly salary to keep her comfortable would be most sufficient, and that before this much was given her, the women of England ought to be better paid for their labour (Hear, hear, and cheers.) But the gentleman in the gallery had said that the Queen Dowager had given away her income in charity (Laughter). It was characteristic of Englishmen to be generous; but then they wished, nevertheless, to see the money they give for particular purposes, earned. (Hear, hear.) She (Miss Walker) came there to explain national abuses and social grievances, and she was resolved to explain and expose them, in public and private, and on all occasions. (Cries of “Bravo! Miss Walker!” “Hear, hear,” and cheers.) Miss Walker then referred the attention of the meeting to the abuses in the New Poor Law system, and narrated, as an instance of its inhumanity, the case of a poor woman whom she saw reduced to go to the parish. She (Miss Walker) knew her. She had three children, from whom she was separated. [Much interruption to the proceedings from “a lacerated knot of Tories” in the gallery, which caused the chairman to call to “Order” and threaten to turn any one out who might disturb the proceedings; and Mr Cuffay to observe, that a better way would be for the party to come forward at the end of the Lecture.] Miss Walker resumed. The gentlemen who thus interrupted her were “Englishmen.” (“Shame, shame!”) and if they agreed in encouraging such laws as fourteen hours a day, or a penny a shirt, while Queen Adelaide got one hundred thousand pounds a year, they were not worthy of her (Miss Walker’s) notice. (“Hear, hear! And loud cheers.) The poor woman to whom she had referred, was dragged and separated from her children, sent to Norwood, and not allowed to be present to close the eyes of one of them at its dying hour. She (Miss Walker) hesitated not to say that a law, under which cruelty was practised, was of a most inhuman, a most barbarous law. (Oft-repeated cries of “Hear.”) But let them look at the provisions of that vile law, and the expenses of working it. (Hear, hear.)

	£	s	d
To three Commissioners at 2,000 <i>l per annum each</i>	6,000	0	0
To Secretary	1,200	0	0
To Assistant Secretaries, one at 700 <i>l, and so forth</i>	1,250	0	0
To Assistant Commissioners, 18 at 700 <i>l each</i>	12,600	0	0
Travelling expenses of those 18 Commissioners and salaries to their Clerks	15,318	0	0

Contrast, she would say, this and other profligate expenditure of this oppressive law, with the workhouse dietary for “the able-bodied pauper,” and take as an example his *Sunday* fare:-

Breakfast	Dinner
Bread 7oz Gruel 1½ pint	Bacon, 2½oz, potatoes 1lb

And as to supper, it just amounted to a few ounces of bread and *one ounce of cheese*. There, she repeated, was “Sunday fare” for an “able-bodied *pauper*.” But in this shameful way was it that the poor of England were treated, while the commissioners of the law drew their thousands, and from thousands to millions (laughter) from the rates levied on the people for “relief of the poor.” Oh! it was too bad! In this way they went on, while the poor infirm person,s and those above seventy years of age, were to be allowed *one ounce* of tea, with milk, seven ounces of sugar, and three ounces and a half of butter, instead of gruel, weekly. (Shame.) There’s for you, continued Miss Walker, a man of 70 years of age, should be in very good condition to live on that. (Hear, hear, and laughter). Divide, for instance, the one ounce of tea into fourteen parts and see how far that would go. (Laughter.) But after all that, the commissioners, perhaps, in the exercise of their economy, carefully collect “the leaves,” and send them back again to their grocers, to be dried and re-issued. (Loud and long continued laughter.) Yet, with all the inhumanity of these workhouse regulations, such as their tearing husband from wife, and parents from children, those commissioners now called them “Unions.” (Great laughter.) Now, a greater misnomer was never heard of. (Hear, hear, cheers, and laughter.) Turning back again to the Royal palaces, and contrasting these doings to the poor, with those within the Royal *menage*, they found the expenses of the Lord Steward for one year, for the item of *wine* alone, 4,850*l*; for liquors, 1,843*l*; and for ale and beer, 2,811*l*. Now that was pretty well for one year’s work. (Laughter.) When she (Miss Walker) read those things, she was not at all surprised at the royal nurse being discovered in a state of “intoxication.” (Great and continued laughter.) But, she would ask, how it was that these things were permitted?

How it was that this system was carried on? (Hear, hear.) She found that it all arose from "Class Legislation," and that of all the persons sent to the House of Commons, not one was sent to represent the "Working-men." ("Hear, hear," and cries of "Shame!") Monopoly if all kinds had its protection in that House. ("Hear.") "The Army" had its protection, "The Navy," "the landed interest," "the Capitalist," and not forgetting "the Church" (laughter) all had their protection, except labour; and the House itself, in fact, was "the very 'key-stone' of monopoly." ("Hear, hear", cheers, and much laughter.) It was because she felt that "the People's Charter" would remedy those and all other social evils, that she stood before that great meeting to endeavour to explain it in all its points. Miss Walker then went over the whole "six points" of "the Charter" in consecutive order, commencing with "Universal Suffrage," then proceeding onward to "Vote by Ballot," "Bribery at Elections," "Annual Parliaments," "No Property Qualifications," and Equal Electoral Districts," each of which she elucidated in a very able and comprehensive manner, infinitely to her own credit, and greatly to the edification of her audience. Were that document the law of the land, she said, soldiers and sailors would have a vote as well as other men, in the representation of the country and for her (Miss Walker's) part, she did not see why those two classes of men, the defenders of their country, the righters of the battles of their country, should not have a vote. (Hear, hear and applause.) She felt that they ought to have; and she hoped they would never rest content until they compel "the Suffrage" to be extended to them. (Enthusiastic cheering.) If the country, she repeated, had "the Charter," it would no longer be disgraced by the use of "bludgeon" and "bayonet" law at elections, "drinking," "treating," &c, for "the ballot" would cure all that; "bribery," under it, with "universal suffrage" would be impossible; for to buy a vote in that case, would be like "buying a pig in a poke," (much laughter) and such men as Mr Feargus O'Connor would be in Parliament as representatives of the people. That gentleman, who had done much service in the cause of the country, and who was so faithful to the people, had been elected, but was declared disqualified to sit, because it was alleged he had not sufficient "Property qualification." Could anything, she would ask, be more absurd than that! (Hear, hear.) And what relation there was between the standard of "gold" and "intelligence" she was quite at a loss to know. In other words, was gold to be made the standard of intelligence? (Cheers.) She would illustrate the absurdity of this property qualification still further, by a reference to the election of Mr Hall, of Marylebone. That gentleman's qualification derived from his wife. He was elected in the morning, she died in the course of the day, and he was not a member of the "honourable house" in the evening. She then referred the attentions of the meeting to Lord Abinger's conduct at the late special commissions. She was sure, she said, if the Charter were adopted,

they would not have such a judge as that – such “a modern Jeffries” – on the judicial bench. (Hear, hear, great hissing at the mention of his Lordship’s name, and cries of “Give it him! Miss Walker!”) No, such conduct as he was guilty of would not, were that document the law of the land, be allowed to pass with impunity, (hear, hear,) and the Bench would be thoroughly purified from such characters. And the “Magistrates,” would they be allowed, under that document, to play such pranks as they had latterly been indulging in? (hear, hear,” and cries of “Bravo!”) On this subject, she alluded to the extraordinary and culpable decision of the magistrates some few days back, in the case of the girl “Morgan,” who was, she said, some shamefully and unjustly committed some days back, by a country justice, for having been guilty of the offence of objecting to pass through the men’s bedroom while they were in their beds. This allusion produced great groaning against the magistrate in question, which was followed up on Miss Walker’s very just criticisms of the committal of the poor girl to prison, and the really demoralizing as well as ruinous effect on her prospects in life, which such incarceration, connected with the poverty it might lead to, might be productive of. She then referred to the church, and to those holy passages in the Bible which pronounce destruction to the suicide, and commented on that species of misconduct of clergymen of the established church, and magistrates, which brings poor creatures down to poverty, and thus leads them to self destruction, the guilt, of which, and the peril of their “soul’s salvation,” she charged on the heads of those magistrates and parsons. She next alluded to the crusade of the Rev Mr Robinson, of Holborn, against his parishioners, some of whom he has thrown in Chancery, and exposed to heavy expenses in that most expensive court in pursuit of his tithes. She handled the reverend gentleman very severely. She dwelt on the oath he had taken at his ordination, on the Holy Evangelists, to the effect “That it was not you or yours he sought, but *you only*,” and urged that he ought to be prosecuted for perjury for violation of that most solemn oath, as in the case of throwing his parishioners into Chancery. (The recommendation was loudly cheered.) Then, with regard to the great expensiveness of that Court of Chancery; she narrated the result of an interview which she had had with the Lord Chancellor on the subject of arresting a bill of sale in the case of an aged friend of hers, named Jacobs, who had been most oppressively dealt with by a Mr John Dent, of Crawford-street, and said that his Lordship’s advice to her was to file a bill, the first step in which would cost 20/. Her aged friend was a poor widow, and had lived for many years in Montague-square. The brutal treatment which she had received was almost beyond belief. For three days she had been kept a close prisoner in her house, almost in a state of starvation, and then dragged therefrom by a policeman, and all under the sanction of class-made law. She recommended these considerations to the notice of the *Times*, if the reporter

form that paper were present. The narration of the cruelty practised in the above case, the minute particulars of which press of other matter now obliges us to omit, excited mingled feelings of sympathy and disgust in the meeting. Referring to the boast made by a gentleman of the gallery of the "Queen Dowager's Charity," Miss Walker put it to the gentleman whether she (the Queen Dowager) would visit that poor widow with her charity. She alluded, in a very ludicrous vein, to those "gosling" officers of the army, who put a handsome uniform, with gold epaulettes, on themselves, strut into drawing rooms, and through the Parks; and said she would not have any objection to their becoming Field Marshalls, provided they "fought their way up to them," on the principle of "win your laurels and wear them," but those green creatures, who purchase their way up over the heads of "brave men," and who never smelled powder, she had no patience with. Such a system was another of the bad effects of "Class Legislation." (Loud cheers and laughter followed this graphic sketch of the present state of our army.) She explained that when she was first drawn out in this agitation, she had not thought of putting herself before the public; but she had on that evening been reading of the conduct of Lord Abinger in his judicial capacity on the Special Commissions, (Groans) and being in the Chartist Hall when the subject of the Charter was discussed, her excited state of mind and sympathy with her suffering fellow creatures in that commission, the "Political Victims," led her to speak on the subject. The *Times* on that occasion made her the subject of its leading articles, covering her with its scoffs and gibes; but where it meant to do harm, she was glad to say it had done much good. (Great cheering.) Miss Walker then stated that she was receiving letters from all parts of the world, encouraging her to go on, and at that moment held one in her hand, which emanated from a public meeting in Perth, signed "John Shannon, secretary," and highly complimentary to her. She concluded by assuring the meeting that if she were satisfied that her coming out had the effect of alleviating the trouble of even one poor fellow, she would feel herself for life repaid, and would go on in that virtuous course, let the obloquy and the consequences that would attach to her be what they might. (Loud, oft repeated, and enthusiastic cheers, amidst which Miss Walker resumed her seat.)

Miss Emma Miles then moved, and Mrs Watts seconded, the thanks of the meeting to Miss Walker, which were accorded with great acclamation.

‘I will present [my petition] at the gates of royalty – I will watch her in the Park, and present it myself, without trusting it to either Graham or Peel’

In early January 1843, Mary Ann Walker gave her first lectures outside London. Speaking at the Chartist Hall off Temple Street, Bristol, she built on the themes of her earlier address of 6 December, but added an interesting anecdote about how she had dissuaded a young man from joining the army, and been threatened with arrest as a result. The *Bristol Times and Mirror*, which carried an account of the lecture (7 January 1843) reported that Mary Ann Walker said she had visited Bristol as part of ‘a tour which I have undertaken and intend to take through England, to enlighten the women of this kingdom so far as I can.’ With the exception of her second lecture in Bristol later in the same week, however, there appears to be no further record of her speaking at public meetings.

### **BRISTOL (CORRESPONDENCE OF THE STAR)**

The Chartists of Bristol have been favoured with a visit from Miss M.A. Walker, who delivered the first of two lectures in the chapel at Bear-lane, Temple-street, on Tuesday evening, 3<sup>rd</sup> inst. Miss Walker commenced by alluding to the unprincipled and base conduct of the public press which upholds monopoly against the rights of the people. From thence she proceeded to expose the cruel system which compels the women of London to make shirts at one penny each; whilst they have to support, not only themselves, but perhaps several children on this miserable pittance. She would ask the Government what was paid for making the military and police clothing. A police coat is made for 3 shillings, and requires two days labour. Can the workman buy coals, candles, pay for house rent, and support a family out of such a sum? Is this justice, whilst one woman, the Queen Dowager, has 100,000/ per annum, and the Government are erecting model prisons to punish the victims of poverty and distress. The Bishop of Oxford pays 6 or 7 shillings per week to his labourers – and this they call Christianity. Are we to close our eyes or shut our mouths, and feel that we should not declare we are hungry. No; we cannot do so, we must find a remedy, and that must be furnished by the people. If they were fairly represented, we would not hear of being ridden over at Peterloo, or blue bottling at Coldbath Fields. (A Voice, “the Whigs and Tories did it.”) Yes, said Miss Walker, and the sooner the working classes unite

*Evening Star,*  
5 January 1843, p2



to drive them from their present unjust and ill-obtained power the better. Miss Walker here read some extracts from a book, which as far as we could learn, was entitled, "A Voice from the North," and made some beautiful and striking remarks on the character of the rich paupers who are pensioners on the State, and the poor paupers who are doomed to starve in the bastiles.

Machinery was the next topic which our amiable friend touched upon, and very happily illustrated her arguments with suitable extracts and anecdotes. The female portion of the meeting, which was very numerous, and amongst whom were the members of the Female Chartist Association, next received their meed of advice from the lecturer. She showed the manner in which women should educate their children, impressed upon them the necessity of inculcating sound principles of moral virtue, to fit them for the duties of their future stations in society, and recommended the Charter as their beacon in search of political and social knowledge. She would not permit the thought that young men should be first driven to hunger, and then to enlist for soldiers, and subsequently, perhaps to have to shoot their own mothers or brothers. She related an anecdote of a young man whom she saw tempted by a "*fellow with gilded epaulets, and half a dozen strings in his hat?*" and how, by her interference, she prevented him being kidnapped; and made her audience laugh heartily at the disappointment of the soldier, who very ungallantly told Miss Walker (we shall use his own words) "I tell you what it is, if I ever catch you again in this park, I will give you in charge to the police; there are too many of your sort about now!" Miss Walker drew a painful but true picture of the progress of poverty amongst the female class of society – how poverty exposed them to crime – and how, when that sad time arrived, they were driven to the streets and treated with scorn and contempt. She argued that men should first look at the cause, and unite to suppress it. Miss Walker next alluded to the death of the woman in Bolton workhouse, and exposed the cruelty of the system which permits such acts to disgrace a country calling itself Christian. "Suppose," said Miss Walker, "the pretty little Queen was taken out of her bed and locked up in the dead-house, and that death ensued, as in the case of this poor woman, what would be the verdict? Would it be like the one here given? Oh, no; I see the rack to punish the offenders! But are we to see our grandmothers and our mothers treated after this manner, and buried alive at the will of wretches in office. If her Majesty was a good Queen, she would be found visiting the homes of the poor, the sick, and the destitute, instead of signing begging petitions for their relieve and earning for herself the title of "Queen of the Beggars." She is a mother, and should be the mother of her people. I will try if she is so; I will try if she is deserving the title of Queen, by her acceptance of the petition which I intend to send her; I will present it at the gates of royalty – I will watch her in the Park, and present it my-

self, without trusting it to either Graham or Peel.

Miss Walker strongly recommended the necessity of union and abstinence from the use of exciseable articles as a means of furthering the good cause.

Miss Walker concluded by calling upon the persons present to put forth all their energies to uproot the present system of bad government – and by moral power alone. I would not, said that lady, waste one drop of honest blood for such a base and corrupt enemy as we have to deal with. Miss Walker was most enthusiastically cheered during the evening, and we are only anxious to meet her again on Thursday.

## Notes and sources

Sources on Mary Ann Walker are limited to newspaper reports of the time, many of which are themselves unreliable or satirical. For that reason, I have used reports from the Chartist *Evening Star*, which could be relied on to be sympathetic in reproducing what she had to say.

In transcribing these reports, I have tried to stick as closely as possible to the texts as published. I have, however, replaced the abbreviation *l* with £ in a few instances for clarity, and removed some of the many full-points after, for example, every mention of Mr. I have also corrected a small number of obvious typesetting errors (and doubtless introduced some of my own).

There are a number of pages on the Chartist Ancestors website that deal with Mary Ann Walker's life in as far as this is possible with the limited biographical information known about her, and her involvement with Chartism. These include:

- [Mary Ann Walker, Chartist Lecturer](#)
- [City of London Female Charter Association](#)
- [55 Old Bailey: the Chartist meeting room](#)

## Author details

Mark Crail runs the [Chartist Ancestors](#) website. A former print journalist, he worked as a news reporter, chief sub-editor and editor before the move to online-only publications. He has written extensively on Chartism and labour movement history.