

Violent Incidents

1886 - Prize Fight in Pymont

Daily Telegraph, 15 December 1886

Working men - in Pymont as much as anywhere else - treated prize fighting as a perfectly legitimate pastime. Breaking up popular fights was not for the faint-hearted.

Jacob Lyne was brought up at the Central Court yesterday, charged with assaulting Constables Dukes and Davis. On Sunday morning a prize fight ... was taking place in the Pymont quarries, and prisoner was one of the principals. He was arrested by Sub-Inspector Lawless and handed over to Dukes and Davis, whom he assaulted by striking them on the face and body and kicking them on the legs. A crowd of about 200 persons ... succeeded in rescuing Lyne from custody. He was arrested, however, on Monday evening. Mr. Maunsell sentenced prisoner to six months' hard labor on each charge of assault, and for riotous behavior he was sent to gaol for seven days. Lyne has recorded against him no less than 10 previous convictions for various offences, four being for assaults on the police. Robert Quigley, the other principal in the fight, was sentenced to seven days' hard labor for riotous behavior.

1912 - Over Pymont Bridge: Police Exploit Recalled

The Sun, 26 August 1912

Police expected their work to be dangerous. George Sparkes had been a soldier before he joined the police force in the 1870s.

Might, to a very great extent, was right in those days, and a very important part of a constable's duty was to be able to take his own part. My most exciting experience happened when I had a rough-up with a couple of toughs at the foot of Market-street. They were fighting, and I went to arrest them. They turned on me and one, after landing a stiff punch on my jaw, scooted across Pymont Bridge.

When he realised that I was overhauling him he hopped upon the side of the old bridge and went head first into the bay. The spirit of the chase was on me and over I went after him. He made for the Pymont shore, which he gained before me as I was hampered by heavy boots and uniform. However, I was not far behind him and the chase began anew.

There were extensive lime-burning areas all over the Pymont side and my quarry made for them. These lime-burners were generally hard-up, so they would gather up shells and burn them for lime. Generally speaking, they were not altogether friendly with the police, and I suppose this is why my man made in that direction. I will never forget the figure we cut in our wet clothes as we made through the snow-white lime. I caught the runaway right in the middle of a white patch and he made a good fight of it. Several times we were on the ground together and rolled over and over in the lime.

1920 – Man fatally shot

The Sun, 2 August 1920

Prize fighting continued for years. In 1920 *The Sun* reported a fatal incident in Bulwarra Road:

Following a fight at Pymont yesterday morning, Sydney Alfred Turner ... was shot dead, and Constable Hardy had to be taken to Sydney Hospital suffering from concussion of the brain and a probable fracture of the skull. There is reason to believe that he will come through all right.

There are few policemen who have had such a rough time as Constable Hardy, Last year he was beaten down by a push in Pymont, and was lame for over four months. Previously he had been roughly handled, but had come out of the troubles with only "a few scratches". A big, good-natured policeman, he has not proved himself aggressive to the pushes that frequent Harris-street, but at the same time he has endeavored to maintain order.

About 12.30 yesterday morning between 20 and 30 men, members of the Quarry-street push, gathered at the corner of Fig- and Harris-streets. They had been drinking liquor from a sly grog-shop, which has such a large number of touts on the look-out for police as to render it almost impossible to raid.

They were in a fightable mood, and two commenced to wrangle. Neighbors were awakened by the noise. Bad language was used, and the place was in uproar. Two men putting up a willing bout in a ring that had been formed, when Constable Hardy and Special-Constable Lyne appeared on the scene.

They ran towards Fig-street. They dashed into the crowd and caught hold of the fighters, deciding to arrest them. They commenced to take them to Pymont-street police station, and then trouble began in earnest. The other men resented the police action, and rushed at them. They tried to get the two prisoners away, but Hardy and Lyne held fast, although assailed with stones and bottles.

Fighting against heavy odds, the policemen got their men close to Allen-street. Then someone hit Hardy on the head with a bottle and downed him. Getting up, he fought back. Shots were fired, and Turner dropped wounded in the groin. He was hurried away to the hospital in a cab by his friends, while Hardy was also taken to hospital. Special-Constable Lyne was uninjured.

A few weeks later the Sydney coroner decided that Hardy, of Pymont police, was justified in shooting Sydney Albert Turner.

The evidence of the police showed that Hardy was attempting to take a man he had arrested to the police station when he was attacked by a hostile crowd and fired only after repeated warnings. (Maitland Weekly Mercury, 23 October 1920)

The Sun took the opportunity to profile Hardy:

Last year he was beaten down by a push in Pymont and was lame for over four months. Previously he had been roughly handled, but had come out of the troubles with only "a few scratches". A big, good-natured policeman, he has not proved himself aggressive to the pushes that frequent Harris-street, but at the same time he has endeavored to maintain order.

When the killing was reviewed, the Coroner judged that Hardy had been justified in shooting Turner. (*Maitland Weekly Mercury*, 23 October 1920)

1929 - Gang Set on Police Agent at Pymont

Sunday Times, 24 November 1929

People who informed for the police – or were suspected of doing so – were also at risk:

A 14 days old infant slept peacefully after a situation which easily might have ended in his death. His father was assaulted by several men at the corner of Little Mount-street and Bridge-road. His mother, who was a nursing mum, sought to interpose herself, and she was manhandled. Clutching the sleeping babe tightly to her breast she screamed and ran to the Pymont Police Station, a few hundred yards away.

The assaulted man is a taxi driver, who has been working as a police agent. Members of the 'Spider' Gang sought to annihilate him because his activities had led to the conviction of some associates.

In self-defence he brought a razor into play and one assailant received a slight arm wound. The police agent himself had to visit Sydney Hospital with a jaw injury caused by a boot.

He and his wife were waiting for a taxi near their home, when a stranger attempted to molest him. In a few moments other men appeared and an all-in fight began. Police from the nearby station hurried over, and burly Constable Walton was forced to use his baton on a man who took from his pocket a bottle with which he attempted to brain the police agent.

Within three minutes a crowd of 200 had congregated, and they followed the posse of police marching two of the 'Spiders' to the station. Even at the station the aggressors used threatening language against the agent. One was charged with riotous behaviour. Another was charged with having assaulted the agent's wife.

And Cyril, the babe, slept through it all.