



Alleged Assault on a Policeman

Odstock - Thanksgiving Day 1872

County Petty Sessions – Tuesday

Before the Earl of Radnor, Mr T E Fowle, Colonel Heathcote, Mr R A Ferryman, Mr W E Matcham, the Rev. E Duke, Mr M H March, Mr J Goff, jun., Mr G M Fort, Mr H J F Swayne, Captain Wigram, and Mr James Hussey.

George Street, Henry Penny, Henry White, Edmund Furnall, George Case and George Yeatman, were summoned for assaulting Charles Fox, of the Wilts Constabulary, whilst in the execution of his duty, at Odstock, on the 27th ult. In his evidence, the complainant said that about nine o'clock in the evening of Thanksgiving Day he saw a bonfire on Odstock Hill, which had been lighted in honour of the Prince of Wales. The Rev. P. E. Miles, the rector of the parish, had sent up eighteen gallons of ale to be distributed amongst those of the parishioners who were present. As the fire lowered the defendants and others commenced throwing the burning sticks about, and witness, who had previously heard Mr Miles request the parties to desist, was struck in the face either with a stick or a stone. One of his eyes was blackened. He took hold of the defendant White, who refused to give his name. The parties continued throwing sticks and stones at him, and one of them knocked off his hat. Witness saw Furnall's and Yeatman's hands go up as if in the act of throwing. Some of the defendants used abusive language towards him, and the party continued throwing sticks and stones at him until he left the ground. Street was the worse for liquor, as were also some of the others.

Noah Wort, of Charlton, said that he was on Odstock Hill on the night of the 27th, and he saw a fiery stick hit the policeman across the face. Witness did not know who threw the stick, but he heard Henry White say, "I did not mean it for you, policeman." He heard Yeatman say that he should like to knock the policeman's "candle-box" off. Stones were thrown at the policeman, and he saw Yeatman's arm up, as if in the act of throwing. In cross-examination the witness admitted that "owing to the fire and something which dazzled his eyes," he had a difficulty in finding his way home. The policeman was very civil, and tried to prevent the people from throwing burning sticks about, because it was attended with danger, there being women and children on the hill. Witness was pitched upon by the party as a Charlton man, although the beer was free to all who came on to the hill. Henry Bracher said that he was on Odstock Hill on the night in question, and saw burning sticks flying about, which he considered dangerous under the circumstances. There was a lot of women and children about, and he did not consider that a policeman's interference was improper or unnecessary.

The defendants said they did not wilfully throw sticks and stones, and it had not been proved that any one of them threw at the policeman. They called the Rev E P Miles, of Odstock, who stated that Mr Squarey and himself agreed that the Thanksgiving Day should be observed, and Mr Squarey sent a wagon with faggots and fuel, in order to make a large bonfire on the top of the hill, and witness gave a barrel of beer. The fire was lighted on a bare hill, three quarters of a mile from the village. Witness was present with his wife and family during the greater part of the time the fire was burning. He never saw a more orderly crowd in his life. There was some "rough play" as the fire got low, and he and his family went away. He did not send for the policeman, and no person was in danger who could use his legs and eyes. Before he went off the ground he told the policeman to stop the throwing, if he could. The policeman was perfectly good tempered, and had his glass of beer in honour of the Prince, as well as the other people. The quantity of beer provided for the whole parish of Odstock was 18 gallons, and the cost was only 10d. a gallon. In his (Mr. Miles') opinion there was no necessity for a policeman to have been present at all. The Earl of Radnor said that it had all been brought about by that abominable barrel of beer, which Mr Miles had sent up, although it only cost 10d. a gallon.

A witness named Edward Marlo said that he was present on the occasion, and he did not see anything thrown at the policeman.

The Earl of Radnor said the defendants had done a very foolish thing, and they must be taught not to do the like again. The policeman was there in the execution of his duty, and was assaulted by burning sticks being thrown at him. All that was very bad. The Bench were of the opinion that there must be a conviction. The defendants must pay a fine of one shilling each and costs, or be imprisoned for seven days. They should remember that they were liable to a fine of 2s. or six month's imprisonment, without the option of a fine. (Captain Sterne, the Chief Constable of the Wilts force, was present to watch the case on behalf of the police.)

Salisbury and Winchester Journal Saturday March 16th 1872

(Note: Queen Victoria's eldest son, the Prince of Wales, had caught typhoid in November 1871 and had been dangerously ill. In her speech for the opening of Parliament in February 1872 the Queen announced she would be present at a service of Thanksgiving in St Paul's for his recovery which took place on 27th February 1872.)