

Corrigan & Drummond on Duty. by Des Drummond.

An interesting historical event, in which my father was a central figure; and which later brought much needed changes to the law; to the benefit of all serving Policemen, is related in the short story told below.

The account has been passed down 'word of mouth' by members of my family, so it still remains something of a mystery, particularly as I wasn't born at the time and have no personal recollection. Precise details have long since been forgotten, but after some research and sight of some of the surviving documents pertaining to the events, this is a short resume of the proceedings as they unfolded.

In 1929, during the Great Depression, unemployment on Tyneside was extremely high, and many families had very little money. It was that period in English history remembered for the Jarrow March which also took place in 1929. Jarrow is but a short distance from Gateshead.

Money was in very short supply, especially for the working man and his family, particularly to those unemployed. The State Benefit system that we know today didn't exist, and many poor families found times very hard.

The pursuit and apprehension of illegal street bookmakers was an everyday duty for all Policemen, made in an effort to stop unlawful street gambling, conserving money for the family.

On Saturday the thirteenth of April 1929, at approximately 2.30 pm, Police Constables Corrigan & Drummond were on duty in a tough area of Gateshead; both men were in civilian clothes; engaged in low profile police surveillance; their orders; to stop and arrest a well known street bookmaker and his runner.

They were keeping watch on a well attended sporting event, probably a road race organized by a 'Harriers' athletic club, evidenced by the large crowd present; but records have not survived to show exactly what the event might have been.

Both of the Police Constables had been doing this kind of work for the past three years, working as a team, and they knew their job. According to a local newspaper of the time, the 'North Mail', they jointly had in three years, secured approximately 250 convictions for illegal street betting offences; but it was well known that public opinion was not on the side of the Police in these actions; the need for a clamp-down on 'Bookies' was not understood or appreciated by many of the 'punters' who took exception to the controls.

Both Constables were experienced Policemen, each with nine years of service, both had received commendations for the control of street betting in the area they operated in, and both had been awarded Merit badges for their diligence, and attention to duty.

After a period of observation, they made two arrests, and were making their back to the Police Station with their prisoners, and their bicycles, when they were confronted by a group of 12 men gathered outside a local Public House. Being 2.30pm the pub had just closed.

The men were hostile to the Policemen, shouting obscenities at them.

A large angry crowd of some 200 people, probably spectators from the sporting event, began to assemble, and were incited by some of the men standing outside the pub.

(The estimated figure of a 200 strong crowd was stated at the following trial.)

Corrigan later named one of the 'ringleaders' in the group, as Robert Morris.

Without warning, PC Corrigan was attacked from behind and knocked down; he fell across his bicycle and also onto his prisoner. PC Drummond went to his aid, hitting out with his fist at the man who had knocked Corrigan down, and was now kicking him as he lay dazed on the ground, encouraging the crowd to do the same.

PC Corrigan was severely kicked whilst on the ground, but eventually regained his feet. Both Policemen managed to retreat from the crowd, and got their backs against the wall of the Public House, which was on the corner of Park Lane and Trinity Street; no great distance from the Police Station. Only then did they draw their truncheons, to keep the crowd at bay until other police arrived. In the melee, both prisoners escaped.

The fight was contained with the arrival of more Policemen, some from the Police Station, and others who were probably on duty in the area, whilst the sporting event was taking place.

PC Chisholm reported that he had to draw his baton to get through the angry crowd.

Five arrests were made, totaling seven in all, when the two escaped prisoners were later re-captured.

First man arrested was Robert Morris, of Park Lane, Gateshead: aged 42: occupation: Glassworker. (Ellison Glassworks factory was situated less than a mile away.)

Morris, who was injured in the fight; was identified by both PC's Corrigan & Drummond, as the person who started it. It was alleged that he was responsible for the blow that knocked Corrigan down.

*It was also alleged that not only did he mount the assault on Corrigan, but that he encouraged others to join in, shouting at the crowd to 'Knock the **'s down', and 'kick their ** guts in', accompanied with much foul language. (Reported 'North Mail' 11th November 1929.)*

Morris lost a tooth in the skirmish, and after his arrest whilst in custody, he said he was punched in the face by PC Drummond. Later in court he identified Corrigan as the person who had punched him in the mouth, and claimed that Drummond had punched him on his ear.

At the Police Station, when questioned by his superiors, PC Drummond acknowledged having struck Morris when coming to the defense of PC Corrigan.

Corrigan in his account of events said that he had seen and heard Morris agitating the crowd even before the assault; that it was Morris who dealt him the blow which knocked him down, and that while he was on the ground, it was Morris who kicked him.

By their own admissions, it is certain that both policemen did punch Morris after his assault on Corrigan, in their duties to control and arrest him, but also in their own self defense.

Back at the Police Station, the Police Surgeon after examining PC Corrigan, who by now was in a state of distress, and was resting, certified severe bruising to his legs, caused by the kicking he had received. Bruising was extensive, confirming that both Constables' accusations against Morris was justified.

On the 8th May 1929, twenty five days after the arrests, all seven persons charged, including Morris, were brought before the Justices. Of the seven summoned, six were found guilty and fined. Morris's case was thrown out.

Morris had attended Court to answer his summons, carried in on a stretcher, apparently suffering an injured leg.

He claimed it was caused by both of the policemen kicking him during his arrest.

He had seen a doctor for a second time the night before his Court attendance, pleading his injury should excuse him attending Court, but the doctor disagreed, and refused to give him a sick note, saying that the injury was much improved since his first examination, some days before. The Doctor advised him to attend.

Twenty five days previously, at the time that he was taken into Police custody, there was no report of any such injuries entered in the Police record, either at the time of his arrest, or when he was brought to the Police Station. No complaint of injuries other than his lost tooth was made when he was bailed into the care of his brother four hours after his arrest.

At the local Magistrates Court, on 8th May 1929 the same date that the six other accused were found guilty of the offences with which they had been charged, Morris, in his own defense produced a number of witnesses; some; members of his family.

All of the witnesses swore that he wasn't the assailant.

The Justices found such a contradiction of evidence, between that given by the police, and that of Morris's witnesses, that the case against him was dismissed.

The question of why he was at the front of a bunch of hostile ruffians, evidently within arm's reach of the two Policemen he later alleged both punched him in the face, or why he should interfere with policemen who were performing their duties in the apprehension of offenders, has never been answered.

Morris claimed that he was pushed to the front by the crowd, to where the policemen were, but that he didn't strike either of the officers.

Two weeks later, Morris sued Corrigan and Drummond in a civil action, for assault.

In addition his alleged injuries had worsened, and he claimed he'd been unable to work. Morris was prosecuting for substantial damages and full costs.

Corrigan & Drummond on Trial.

The case was heard before Judge Sir Francis Greenwell at Newcastle upon Tyne County Court, on Friday 31st October 1929.

The case was not heard before a jury.

The defense of Corrigan and Drummond was presented by a top London Barrister to little avail. Medical examination and reports of Morris's leg injuries was presented by both Prosecution, and Defense witnesses. The Judge described it as a serious injury.

From the Witness Box both Policemen said that it was Morris who struck and knocked down PC Corrigan, that he was at the front of the crowd, shouting obscenities, inciting others to attack the Policemen; that he was at the centre of the attack, and that after he had knocked Corrigan to the ground, he was one of the assailants who kicked PC Corrigan as he lay injured.

Morris claimed never to have been involved, even though an independent civilian witness came forward to swear that he saw Morris assault PC Corrigan.

Corrigan & Drummond, as private individuals, pleaded their case. Their defense was that they were acting responsibly in the course of their Police duties; that Morris was injured as a result of his unprovoked assault upon PC Corrigan, that he was part of a group seeking trouble, and that it was he who started the fight when he hit PC Corrigan from behind, and then kicked him whilst he lay dazed on the ground.

They both denied kicking Morris.

Five Policemen of various ranks, some senior, gave evidence at the hearing. All of the Police called, defended the actions of both Corrigan & Drummond, some having been called to the scene of the fracas to help break up the fight, others being at the police station when the prisoners were brought in.

Police witnesses drew attention to the fact that Morris's leg injuries were not noticed or recorded at the time he was taken into police custody. Morris's single complaint concerned only the broken tooth.

The Judge was not persuaded.

Evidence was also given by an independent witness, a Mr Edward Wm. Robinson of Bolden Colliery, who had watched the arrest. Robinson had heard the case being discussed by others and felt that the real truth of the matter ought to be known. He came forward of his own volition, swearing on oath that he was not coerced into doing so by any person or third party. He claimed not to know, or of ever having spoken to either Corrigan or Drummond.

Giving his evidence, Robinson said that he had seen Morris strike Corrigan, knocking him down.

His account of what he had witnessed didn't influence Judge Greenwell.

Judge Greenwell in his summing up, which was delayed until the 8th November 1929, first said that he wished the case had been heard before a jury. He then said that Morris had indeed suffered injury; and he went on to say that unnecessary force was used by the two policemen,

The Judge referred to the evidence of a local shopkeeper, a neighbour acting as a witness for Morris, who had heard the commotion, and had left her shop to see what was happening. She reported seeing 'two big men' hitting Morris. (It should be remembered that both Officers were in plain clothes.) The Judge also expressed his amazement that the Policemen in their defense actions of needing to draw their truncheons; didn't also blow their whistles to summon help!

In awarding both damages and costs to Morris, Judge Greenwell to some extent 'excused' the actions of the two Constables, for he added, that they (the Policemen) 'were only human', and had 'made a mistake'; inferring that it was all very understandable that they had acted in such a heavy handed manner in the heat of the moment.

The Judge did not comment on the wider picture of the occurrence, of the pressure on the two Policemen who were dealing with a serious situation, much outnumbered by an aggressive crowd; or whether mitigation applied. Nor did he comment on the original trials when the other six accused were each found guilty as charged, proof that this had been a serious occurrence in which the two Officers were caught up.

Judgment was passed that the two Constables were each responsible for the awarded damages and costs. Subsequently, Bailiffs were appointed to collect the damages and costs which Corrigan & Drummond were ordered to pay.

It is perhaps strange, that after Judge Greenwell had questioned the behavior of the two officers, and found against them, that they didn't lose their jobs; but it is recorded that he said to the Prosecution Counsel, that he didn't think that they should.

The local newspaper of that time (North Mail) reported the case as it unfolded in the Courts. At the conclusion and after the verdicts were passed down, the Editor in his Editorial, wrote that the two Policemen had been 'betrayed', inferring that more should have been done to defend them. He may also have been alluding to the unusual phrases used by Judge Greenwell in his Judgment, and to his apparent disregard of the witnesses appearing for the Police Officers.

The Editorial also urged that the Local Authority should look to the payment of damages and costs.

Nevertheless, in line with police discipline and the findings of the court; PC's Corrigan and Drummond were each reprimanded and cautioned for their handling of the events and their use of unnecessary force in the apprehension of their prisoner. Both officers strongly denied the accusations, and they and their advocates offered to present themselves before the Watch Committee to answer any charge. There is no record found that this request was followed through.

Later in his report to the Watch Committee; The Chief Constable, Richard Ogle spoke highly of the Constables, saying, "I view them as first class Constables, who have proved themselves energetic and resourceful, and I have faith in their honesty of purpose". He also cited the various commendations each Constable had received during previous years of service, in his very apparent defense of his valued men, in whom he had staunch belief.

During this time, PC79 Drummond and his family were living in a Police House adjacent a sub Police Station. That fact did not deter the Bailiffs from attempting to exercise their duties. PC Drummond was advised by his superiors to secure his home against the Bailiffs, and deny them entry. There were moves afoot to recommend that the monies be found from the public purse, but legalities had to be observed and would take time. Consequently my father, mother and their young family lived in a constant state of siege for a considerable period, as time dragged on.

The problem lay in the fact that there was no procedure for members of the public to seek redress against a Policeman, who, acting outside the law, provided reason for complaint of his actions. The only course open to a complainant, was the raising of a civil court action against the policeman as a private individual.

On duty Policemen acting correctly or otherwise, did not have the automatic support of their Constabulary to defend their actions in the course of their directed Policing duties, as is the case today. If a Civil case was found against an individual Policeman, and damages and costs were awarded against him, then meeting those damages and costs, were solely his personal responsibility.

Fortunately for Corrigan and Drummond they had influential advocates on their side that saw the need to change the old ways and introduce new legislation.

Finally the unique facts of this specific case did bring changes in the law.

The case was debated in Parliament, and endorsed by The House of Lords. It is recorded in 'Hansard'.

Corrigan & Drummond were relieved of the damages and costs of the case, which were paid from the public purse by the Local Authority. The new legislation passed; ensured that Policemen involved in questionable actions in the course of their duties, could not be pursued in private actions brought by members of the public.

In future, actions naming individual Police Officers would have to be brought against their Constabulary, who would defend or prosecute the case in question, to the satisfaction of the Court.

Today, the public has redress through the Independent Police Complaints Commission. Surprisingly, this body was not formed until April 2004.

For the whole period of time that elapsed, whilst this case was being resolved, PC's Corrigan and Drummond were engaged in full time police duties, they were not suspended. They were fully supported by their families, their friends and their colleagues. They were greatly encouraged by their superiors who stood by them, defending them, at all times.

Police Constables John Corrigan & Adam Drummond were regular partners 'on the beat' and were known, respected, and regarded affectionately, by the local community. In Gateshead, almost everyone knew them, or knew of them, the two names were inextricably linked...Corrigan & Drummond.

During their long careers which embraced service during the entire period of World War 2, with many nights spent on duty whilst enemy air raids were bombing the heavy industrial areas around the Tyne, they were each commended many times.

They remained firm friends long after their respective retirements, and both left the 'Force' with exemplary conduct references for long and devoted service, of more than fifty years between them.

As a boy I knew John Corrigan, he was a big good natured Irishman from Southern Ireland, gently spoken, with a lovely Irish brogue. Always full of fun, he was my Dad's lifelong good friend. When my father Adam Drummond died in July 1974, John Corrigan attended the funeral. He died shortly after.

I'd like to think that they're both on duty at the 'Pearly Gates'.

Des Drummond.

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desdrummon@aol.com.