

# Officer fought for life amid hostile crowd

The severity of the attack on Pc Fred Alsbury (right) is astonishing bearing in mind the time it took place, 1925. Here extracts from the original court case carried in the Derby Evening Telegraph shed light on the incident, and demonstrate how court reporting has changed.



**A**FTER an adjournment of three months the case in which a young Derby man is charged with wounding Pc Alsbury was investigated by the Derby Borough magistrates this morning (August 31, 1925).

The alleged offence took place on Whit Monday last, June 1, and as a result of the injuries the constable has been receiving treatment at the infirmary ever since.

The accused is William Jardine of 67 City Road and he was defended by Mr M B Parry Jones.

Constable Alsbury entered the court on crutches with one leg still bandaged. Telling the story of his encounter with the accused, Pc Alsbury said that he was on special duty at the time at Taft's dancing academy. The prisoner sought admission but as he was drunk he was refused.

Thereupon he mumbled something, produced some money and then went out into the street again. Later he returned and was shown out once more. He came back a third time and when asked why he did not go home he mumbled again and struck the witness a violent blow between the eyes.

This statement drew from the prisoner an interruption. He ejaculated: "Liar!" and was told by the magistrates' clerk to behave himself.

Continuing the evidence, the constable said he took the prisoner into custody and escorted him along Siddals Road, Calvert Street and Midland Place. At the corner of the latter thoroughfare the prisoner said to him sharply: "Are you going to let me go? If you don't I shall slash you!" Almost simultaneously he struck at the witness's face with his right fist and wrenched himself free. Warding the blow off, the witness sent the prisoner to the ground with a blow on the body.

The prisoner's mother and sister were there at the time as well as a gang of about 20 men and youths and one of the men kicked the witness in the stomach.

The witness attempted to handcuff the prisoner and stepped up to him to do so. As he did so Jardine took hold of his left leg. At that moment the witness received more blows and kicks from the crowd. He felt the accused doing something to the back of his leg and, on looking round, saw him cutting at the limb with a razor. Realising he was losing a lot of blood and that the prisoner might escape, he struck Jardine several blows on top of his head with his truncheon.

He blew his whistle and called upon a young man for assistance, but he mounted his cycle and rode away. The witness saw that the prisoner could not escape then pressed the arteries of his leg to staunch the bleeding.

He had nearly lost all his strength and as he was falling to the ground the prisoner's mother put both hands round his throat and said: "You swine. I will strangle you." He had to give her a severe push to make her release her grip.

A civilian pressed an artery and then an LMS police sergeant arrived and applied a tourniquet. The witness was taken to the infirmary where he remained until August 13.

Dr Jean Hall Morton, house surgeon at Derbyshire Royal Infirmary, gave evidence of the serious nature of the wounds. On admission the constable was pulseless and suffering from severe shock due to excessive loss of blood. At the time she did not think he would recover.

For five or six weeks his condition was serious. There were three wounds in his leg, the upper one having gone through two layers of muscle severing the main artery and main nerve.

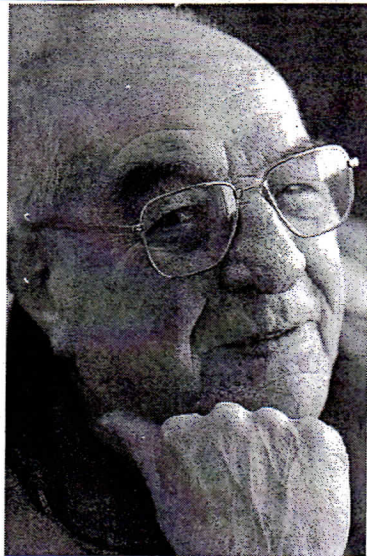
**J**ARDINE pleaded not guilty but on November 11, 1925, was sentenced to six years penal servitude for malicious wounding.

Mr Justice Talbot told Jardine he had been a hairsbreadth away from appearing on a charge of murder.

On hearing the sentence Jardine exclaimed: "Six \*\*\*\*\* years, God blime."



# PC LOST LEG RAZOR ATT



*William Alsbury looks back at his father's life.*

**T**HE loss of a leg so early in his service could have brought Fred Alsbury's police career to a sudden end. In 1925 at the age of 32 he lay at death's door for weeks after being slashed several times by a man he was arresting during a fracas outside a dance hall in Siddals Road, Derby.

At a time when violent crime was quite rare it was a shocking thing to happen on the town's streets.

Many of his colleagues at Derby Borough Police were convinced that he would never return to the job but they had not taken into account the bravery and spirited determination of the man.

For Pc Fred Alsbury, Whit Monday, 1925, was just another night's work when he was on duty outside Taft's dancing academy in Siddals Road, near Derby Station.

A drunk tried to gain admission to the dance several times and Fred turned him away but the man returned and punched the officer between the eyes.

Fred took him in hand but as he was frog-marching the man to the police station a crowd of his relatives and friends gathered round and kicked the officer in an attempt to free the drunk.

Fred managed to keep hold of him and was trying to put on handcuffs when the man suddenly produced a razor and began slashing his leg.

Despite bleeding profusely he managed to hold on to him and blew his whistle for help.

With deep gashes under his thigh, people ran to his aid including a railway police sergeant who applied a tourniquet.

"To all intents and purposes," said William, "my father was dead.

"When he got to the hospital the doctor said there was no pulse and hardly any blood inside him. It was a miracle he survived. I think it was only because he had always kept himself so fit."

It was months before Fred was well enough to be interviewed and, three years later, it was decided that his leg would have to be amputated.

Meanwhile, Derby Town Council's Watch Committee decided to award Fred £20 for meritorious conduct in arresting a prisoner.

Said Alderman Dr Laurie at the time: "It is ten thousand pities that such a promising young man should have been so terribly injured in this way."

Though sympathy was plentiful Fred did not wallow in self pity. Quite the opposite. He coped well with his disability and never allowed it to stop him doing the things he enjoyed – including his job.

He was a police constable in the days before officers had the benefit of two-way radios, powerful motorbikes and fast cars.

In the Twenties and Thirties policemen pounding the beat were expected to check every business and shop door on their patch two or three times a night – and found themselves up before the Chief Constable the next morning if any of the premises had been burgled overnight.

Policemen deterred crime by being ever-present in the town centre. They seemed to be around every corner, blowing a whistle if they were in need of help, and maintained a friendly, approachable image by stopping for regular chats with locals.

"If you want to know the time ask a policeman," was a popular saying.



*Fred Alsbury at the age of 21 in 1914, a few years away from a brutal attack which left him disabled*

These were the area's first community policemen before anyone had even conjured up the description.

With a false leg and the aid of a walking stick, Fred continued to do his job to the best of his ability. And he did so well he was eventually promoted to detective in CID.

Said William: "He did administrative work and was an excellent detective. He was the sort of man who people would tell things to.

"I remember he would go to the cafe in the Market Hall where he would meet informants who told him

*Fred Alsbury, a Derby Borough policeman from the Twenties to the mid-Forties, was involved in an incident which shocked the town back in 1925. He lost a leg and almost lost his life after an horrific street attack. But, despite struggling with his disability, he continued serving Derby Borough Police. His son William Alsbury (82), of Sunnyhill, tells Pat Parkin about the man who became affectionately known as Pegleg to his colleagues and friends.*



# AFTER FRENZIED TACK IN STREET



*Fred's wife Sarah in 1913. She was police matron at Derby's Lock Up Police Station.*

he wanted to do and had a great sense of humour about it. On one occasion his false leg broke when he was walking in Derby's Market Hall and he told pals later that women walking by needed smelling salts when they saw his leg in two pieces.

Another time his leg broke while the retired detective was walking along the promenade at Skegness in July, 1952.

He couldn't let this ruin his holiday and, as he had a spare artificial limb carefully packed back home with a neighbour in Osmaston Park Road, Derby, he decided to get hold of it one way or another.

So he took a taxi to a telephone and rang one of his sons, Fred, who lived at nearby Boston. Fred jnr leapt swiftly into action. He chartered a Boston Airways' plane and made the 160-mile air trip to collect it. The police helped too, picking up the spare leg in Derby and taking it to the airport.

Fred jnr told the Derby Evening Telegraph at the time: "When we arrived at Derby I just jumped out of the plane, collected the leg, jumped back in again and we took off for Skegness."

Less than three hours after telephoning for help the spare leg was with Fred senior, enabling him to complete the last three days of his holiday.

After that he never travelled anywhere without taking his spare leg and once it caused an aeroplane taking him to Canada to be delayed when the metal limb was traced to his luggage. "I think they thought there was a body in the hold," laughed William.

He recalls a happy childhood in Derby, particularly when the family lived in a house attached to the Lock Up Police Station in Lock Up Yard, just off The Cornmarket, where his father was in charge of the prisoners and his mother was the police matron.

"Prisoners waiting to go to court were held there. They'd be in the Lock Up until the time came for them to go downstairs into the underground passage system, which went under the Market Hall.

"From there they were taken to the court at the Guildhall in the Market Place. Our house was where today's fish market is.

"This was before the days of Full Street Police Station when the main police station was in Bloomfield Street."

One of William's lasting memories there was of chasing rats and mice which used to scamper along the underground passages.

"We loved going ratting and used a leather bag to catch the mice and rats and roll them up.

"Under the house was a big underground kitchen - it must have been 20ft long - and that's where my mother prepared the food for the prisoners and the family."

Nearby, William recalls, was the Cavendish Cafe where the Barker family had a boy of his age.

"I used to have lots of lovely meals there. I also liked going because he had every comic that came out. My favourite was Wizard and after we'd read them we used to sell them again."

Fred stayed fit until the last six months of his life and when he died, aged 90 in 1984, he had been living with his son at Sunnyhill.

*Have you got memories of life in the Derbyshire Police force in days gone by? Do write with your stories. Our address is Page 20.*

about crimes. In those days 90 per cent of crime was cleared up through information received by the police - they don't get that sort of co-operation today."

When he had completed 25 years' service in 1944 Fred retired, though the decision was forced upon him because of problems caused by the injuries received in the attack 18 years previously.

But his links with the police were not over. He was promptly hired to be steward at the Police Social Club at Full Street, a position he held for 10 years.

Meanwhile he had more time to enjoy his sporting

and leisure interests, which he managed to keep up despite losing a limb.

When he played cricket he had his son as his runner - "not a bad idea really as I had been schoolboy cross country champion so we were often on the winning side," laughed William.

Fred was also the champion snooker and billiard player among Derby policemen and supported the highly successful Derby Borough Police boxing team.

He rarely let his disability get in the way of what