

During the early part of 1894, we the Senior Boys, then occupying the original Lower House, realised that contrary to well established custom, we were no longer *persona grata* with the Headmistress of the D.S.G., because foresooth, we had not been invited to such functions as the Annual Picnic at Dassie Krantz or the Annual Dance at Headquarters. On making tentative enquiries we were informed by Miss Burwash, second in command, that for some time past, three Andreans (recognised by their blazers) had been following the D.S.G. Rank en route to and from the Cathedral when attending Sunday Evening services. And furthermore, that these fellows had gone so far as to throw Chinese Jumping Crackers among the girls. In consequence of these unseemly attacks, the whole College was under a D.S.G. cloud. Hence these tears.

On receiving this disturbing information, the Lower House went into Committee and it was decided that we should bunk the evening service at Chapel and proceed down Town in order to deal firmly and effectively with the three unknown miscreants.

Sure enough, on the following Sunday evening the three culprits were caught re-handed throwing crackers among the girls and enjoying the fun of seeing the girls scattering right and left. They were promptly arrested and brought up to the Lower House Dining Room for trail. A judges' Bench was placed upon the main table. Three wash stands *sans* basins, were converted into prisoner's docks. Arthur Dell was appointed Judge, wearing his Cap and Gown, Marius Flemmer was the Public Prosecutor, and Pat O'Brien had the unenviable role of Counsel for the defence. George Atherstone, six foot tall, and dressed in a night shirt was the Court Constable, duly armed with an Indian Club. Nine good men and true were assigned to the jury bench, and all was set for the trial. The accused, on the advice of their Counsel, pleaded "Not Guilty" to the charges of:

- (a) Assault by throwing crackers at the girls,
- (b) Behaving on a manner inconsistent with the honour of St Andrews and gentlemen.

The Public Prosecutor called the following witnesses, W. Lanham, George Marais, Reg Saner and R.J. Aldum. Lanham robed in a red blanket, with pipe in hand, gave his evidence in Xhosa, with many exclamations and clicks. George Marais was, for the nonce, a Cape coloured, speaking a mixture of English and Afrikaans. Reg Saner was a French witness who shrugged his shoulders and exposed the palms of his hands. Needless to say, theses witnesses brought down "the House" and the accused joined in the hearty laughter with the rest of us.

Ou last witness was R.J. Aldum, a Free Stater, who testified in English. O'Brien did not call any evidence for the Defence, but pleaded passionately for an acquittal on the ground that his clients thought that the girls were enjoying the fun as much as they did. Their appeal was not accepted and the jury returned a verdict of guilty on both counts.

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Thereupon Mr Justice Dell, after reviewing the evidence gave the culprits a severe dressing down and sentenced them to be inked up to their knees (an old Chinese custom) and to receive three light strokes with a builders lath, which happened to be lying around. George duly carried out the order of the Court, and when it was over the three accused, who treated the matter lightly, turned to the Judge and thanked him for his leniency.

But lo and behold the next day the fat was in the fire. A leading City Councillor drove up to the College in his carriage and pair, accompanied by accused No. 1 in order to interview our Principal, the Reverend Canon Espin. He was followed quite soon by a highly placed Government Official in a carriage and pair and second culprit complete. This gentleman was armed with a letter from the worthy and irate parent of culprit No. 3, all complaining that their dear lads had been shamefully treated and demanding our heads on chargers.

After lunch the Principal had us all on the carpet and called for an explanation for having "assaulted" the sons of three prominent citizens of Grahamstown on Sunday night. We explained the circumstances referred to and said that in our opinion the accused had had a fair trial and a just sentence.

Instead of a severe reprimand, Canon Espin, with a twinkle in his eye dismissed us saying, "Your conduct was perfectly natural and proper in the circumstances." He however added that we were expected to apologise to the parents of the three lads, but with one voice we replied: "No sir, unless you order us to do so." Canon Espin smiled and said, "I will not give you such an order."

Canon Espin must have informed the irate parents of our decision, because two days later a Sergeant of Police called at Lower House when we were enjoying our supper, consisting of weak tea and bread and scrape, and dished out 19 summonses charging us with assault, and instructing us to appear in the Local Magistrate's Court to stand trial three days hence. We gave the old Sergeant three hearty cheers and invited him to join us at supper, which he did. When leaving he remarked that that was one of the happiest service of process he had ever performed.

Next day we opened a subscription list and retained the late Mr Lex Giddy as Counsel for the defence and at the same time engaged the only Horse-drawn Bus in Town to convey us, in a body, to the Court. At this stage the news of the pending Trial had spread through the Town, and many citizens informed us that they intended attending the trial. Among others who got to learn about what promised to be a somewhat unique case, was the Right Reverend Bishop Webb D.D. who in his capacity as Patron of both St Andrews and the D.S.G., decided that the matter had gone far enough. He therefore called a conference at which he presided, consisting of Canon Espin, the three parents of the "cracker experts"

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The Bishop who was greatly respected and loved by all, first addressed the parents and informed them that in his opinion their sons had on three occasions behaved in a caddish manner and thereby upset the Teachers and Girls of D.S.G. He then turned to our deputation and said that we acted in a somewhat high-handed manner and asked whether in the circumstances we were prepared to apologise to the parents of the complainants.

Flemmer replied: "My Lord we are prepared to apologise for carrying out a simple act of Justice, but for the sake of all concerned, we are prepared to express regret for having taken the law into our own hands." The Bishop turned to the complainants and said : "Gentlemen, will you accept the expression of regret as stated by the last speaker?" The parents gladly accepted the compromise, and thereafter the case was withdrawn. As Mr Giddy refused to accept a fee, we presented Mrs Giddy with one of Cowie's best bouquets and our sincere thanks.

When the Kings and the Captains had departed the barrier was down, and henceforth the seniors at Lower House became V.I.Ps at all D.S.G. Social functions, and we trust that it is still so in the present year of grace.

M.T.F.