

Percy Adrian Aubin (1910 - 1924)



1910's
Silver Gelatin Print
38 x 49cm

John Edwin Pinel (1905 - 1910)



1920s
Silver Gelatin Print
42 x 58cm

In 1910, after Percy Aubin became a Jurat, the field was open for two new candidates to vie for the honorary role of Constable. One of these was Edmund Toulmin Nicolle (who contested Mr Baudains in 1899) and the other was Advocate John Pinel.

“Johnny” Pinel, as he was known, had been a Centenier in St Helier between 1899 and 1902 and in 1899 he was called to the Jersey Bar as an advocate. In 1900 he raised the Clameur de Haro, an attempt to save some of the garden at his home in First Tower being lost to the extension of Victoria Avenue, but his claim was not successful. Mr Pinel became a Deputy in 1907 for Mont à L'Abbé and after three years at the post decided to put himself forward for Constable.

His proposer said that his career; *“has been ever marked by a note of strength, of singleness of purpose and fixity of aim, tempered by a kindly sympathy and consideration for others. Mr Pinel, before all things, is a patriot”*.

The outcome of the election saw Mr. Pinel win with a relatively small majority of 84. He received 878 votes and his opponent Mr. Nicolle got 794. Interestingly the Evening Post was (again) supporting Mr Nicolle and they expressed *“regret”* that Mr Pinel had won.

However they accepted that his victory was a democratic one and wrote;

“When the smoke and dust of battle will have disappeared we will watch Mr. Pinel’s administration with keen sympathetic interest, and may he during his term of office shed lustre, not only on himself, but on the town of which he is the municipal chief”.

It can now be said with some confidence that Mr. Pinel did indeed prove himself for the role. In the Assembly Room at the Town Hall there is a plaque dedicated to his relief efforts during the outbreak of Spanish influenza in the autumn of 1918. Not even Jersey escaped the pandemic, with three hundred people dying within the space of six weeks. A newspaper wrote;

“Frankly, the Constable of St Helier has been the pivot on which practically the whole scheme of special poor relief and public safety has turned during the island’s extremity, and for these efforts he richly deserves the warm thanks of the whole community”. (8/11/18)

The praise for Mr Pinel was far reaching; he was generally recognised as the hero of the hour. From the outset he recognised the huge organisational effort that was needed and set up procedures accordingly. The Constable organised employment of a nurse by the Parish, who could coordinate VADs and volunteers from the Town Hall, in order to keep the pressure off the rest of the medical community. He advertised in the paper for owners of motorcycles with sidecars to come forward and help with medical delivery. After the Voisin motor ambulance broke down, they resorted to horse and cart, leaving calls for the Parish to have their own ambulance. After a suggestion from the Dean, Mr Pinel organised the distribution of free beef tea to the sick and their families to build up their strength. He set up specially organised kitchens at First Tower, Columberie and the Communal Kitchen for this purpose. Furthermore the Town Hall was the control centre for the scheme of removing the dead, dying and the sick to the General Hospital. The Honorary Police, other Parish officials and the Constable himself were out helping the volunteer effort to visit and relieve the sick, especially in the poorer areas of town, where the outbreaks were worse.

The Morning News wrote that;

“But for this system, ours would have been a state of chaos and we were afraid that the death toll, already distressingly high, would have been far higher” (Fri Nov 8, 1918).

A glowing tribute to the Constable read;

“In a word, Mr Pinel has done everything within his power to relieve suffering, build up the weak and restrict the dire effects of the epidemic. And his interest has not been mainly and entirely centred in St Helier. The country parishes have sought his aid, and have not sought in vain”. (c. Nov 1918)

A group of people met on November 17, 1918 to thank the Constable and his supporters for their efforts during the epidemic. However many people felt that this gathering was not sufficient enough to express the full extent of their gratitude. The parishioners decided to create a permanent memorial, in the form of a plaque, as Mr Pinel’s efforts meant so much to the people of the Island.

In June 1922, after the Constables fifth election, a banquet was held at the Grand Hotel to celebrate. The former Constable, Mr Percy Aubin, gave the toast and said that *“he could testify to the excellence and success of the administration”* (MN 2/6/1922). On a previous occasion he [Mr Aubin] had made reference to the fact that, in his opinion, long terms in office were a mistake. However he felt that the electorate should not underestimate common sense and *“when they got the right man, they should endeavour to keep him”*. Mr Aubin went on to say that during the influenza epidemic Mr Pinel’s true character had shone through and he became *“the little man with the big heart”*. Twelve years before Mr Pinel had inherited a debt of £18,000 and was now reduced to £8,000. Furthermore the Constable was seen to be carrying out improvements without risking what they already had.

In September of the same year Mr Pinel and his wife were presented with gifts for their lengthy services to the Parish. The occasion was marked with a dinner at the Town Hall and the Constable was presented with a clock which was meant to symbolise the *“long hours on the 40 or 50 committees to which he belonged and if the Constable made a straightforward confession, the longest was undoubtedly his pet scheme, electric light”* (MN 5/9/1912). The Morning News recorded Mr Pinel’s speech where he began by saying; *“as they knew he was not a nervous man, but he was overwhelmed with the kindness and gratitude of his parishioners”*.

He went on to say; "he did not forget that in 1918 they decided to erect a tablet, and he thought that was the crowning point of his municipal career, and they could not have offered a greater honour than by recording his services as they did then" (5/9/1922).

Mrs Pinel was also thanked with a necklace that was a miniature replica of the Constables chain of office, the speaker, a Mr E.J. Gallichan, said that *"her name had not been written on the tablet of brass at the town hall, but it deserved to be"*.

Changes in the Town included; wooden paving being introduced to Charring Cross, New Street and Columberie in 1913 and in 1921 the Fire Brigade moved to new premises in Nelson Street. Major discussions took place at the Parish Assembly regarding the tenders for electric lighting in the Town and the Constable printed a warning in the paper, concerning the streets being turned into a *"free garage"*, which suggested that the town's traffic problem had begun.

Mr Pinel was also the first Constable to be presented with the insignia of office, which is a large gold chain and pendant, bearing the coat of arms of the Island (as the Parish crests were not designed until 1921) and inscribed with his name. All subsequent Constables have had their names inscribed on the chain itself.

Mr Pinel left his position as Constable, after fourteen years, to become one of the Island's twelve Jurats (who at this time had seats in the States). Throughout his later years Mr Pinel remained active in Island life. In July, 1938, Mr Pinel was having a few disagreements with the new Constable Mr Cuming.

The "Critic" wrote;

"This time our Police Magistrate, who takes such a very keen interest in Parochial matters lost the day, but we musn't think that because of that the Town Hall has seen the last of him. Mr Pinel is nothing, if not, pertinacious".

During the evacuation of Jersey, in June 1940, Mr Pinel was one of the Island dignitaries who stood on the Quay and tried to stop the panic and persuade people to stay. A particular story about Mr Pinel from the Occupation (when he was a Magistrate) endorses this idea that he had a no-nonsense attitude.

In one court case against an Italian man, who had been accused of stealing, his judgement made great reference to *"the importance of upholding British justice"*- something that was hastily censored by the Nazi forces!

Edward Le Brocq recalls "Johnny" in his Memoirs. He writes;

"There wasn't a great deal of him in the physical sense but he feared neither man nor devil...If ever a man had guts it was Johnny Pinel". Unfortunately Mr Pinel passed away at the age of 80 in 1943, before seeing the Island liberated, but his many contributions to Parish life were remembered well by those he had served.