

The return of crime for the year ended the 31st December, 1897, forwarded to your office on the 24th February, 1898, shows that during the year 2,899 offences of various kinds were reported as against 3,089 reported during 1896, while 2,781 persons were either taken into custody or proceeded against by summons for various offences. Of these the most numerous were the arrests for drunkenness, for which 1,012 persons were apprehended as against 1,091 for 1896. There were 170 charged with common assaults as against 163 for 1896. Sixty-three cases of burglary were reported as against ninety-six for the previous year. Thirty-two persons were charged with breaches of the peace against sixty-one for 1896. Thirty-nine were reported for deserting their wives and families against 145 for the previous year. There were 106 charged with failing to support their parents and near relatives against seventy for 1896. There were 135 arrests made for lunacy against seventy-five for the previous year. Eighty were charged with using obscene language against 103 for 1896. Seventy-seven were charged with malicious injury to property against sixty-six for the previous year. Forty-three were charged with resisting the police against forty-two for 1896. Fourteen were charged with assaulting the police against twenty-three for the previous year. There were 330 charges of ordinary theft preferred as against 294 for 1896. There was one case of murder, for which the offender was convicted and suffered the extreme penalty of the law. The case was no ordinary one, and was, in fact, one of the worst ever committed in this colony.

The offender who for the last three years has destroyed so many horses in and around Christchurch is still at large, notwithstanding the exertions of the police and the large reward lately offered for his arrest.

Prosecutions of publicans for Sunday-trading have been frequent during the year, but the fact that the public can gather in hotels upon Sundays in any number without such being a breach of the law places an obstacle in the way of prosecutions, over which the police find it difficult to get. To make the Act effective the law of New Zealand should be similar to the law in force in England, persons found in hotels upon Sunday should be liable to prosecution, unless they are either lodgers or travellers.

I would again urge that a substantial increase be made in the strength of Christchurch station. The total strength of the station twenty-one years ago, when the population of the place was certainly not more than half what it is at present, was fifty men of all ranks, now it is forty, though each year brings additional duties to the police to perform.

Formerly a medical man was appointed to attend to the police of this station, but owing to retrenchment his services were dispensed with. I would be glad if a medical man were again appointed to the post. Medical bills are heavy items in the expenses of constables who receive such very small pay.

A new station is required at Linwood, a suburb of Christchurch, and another at Belfast, about seven miles from here. A constable is also wanted during the summer months at New Brighton, a sea-bathing resort about five miles from Christchurch.

INSPECTOR W. S. PARDY, DUNEDIN, SOUTHLAND, AND LAKES.

I have the honour to submit for your information the state of the Police Force in this district, together with the state of crime and other offences during the year ending the 31st December, 1897:—

The numerical strength of the district at the present time is 111, consisting of one Inspector, fifteen sergeants, ninety-three constables, and two detectives; also one district constable stationed at Stewart's Island and twenty-one troop horses, distributed amongst fifty police-stations.

By the Annual Offences Return, already furnished, you will see that the total number of offences reported during the year was 2,376, being an increase on the previous year of ninety-seven.

In comparing the offences for the two years, 1896 and 1897, you will see that in some offences there has been a considerable increase during the past year—especially is this the case in regard to drunkenness, while in others there has been to a certain extent a corresponding falling off.

Two serious crimes against the person were committed during the past year—viz., one of wife murder, and the other of attempted murder—in both cases convictions were obtained, and in the former case the death penalty has since been carried out; and in the latter a penalty of fifteen years imprisonment inflicted.

The recent increase in the number of sergeants has had a beneficial effect on the Force through increased supervision, and the new hope it holds out to intelligent and honourable men of advancement in the service—such hope for years past having been completely dead.

As regards sly-grog selling in the Clutha district, every effort has been made by the police to obtain convictions, and such efforts have been fairly successful. Although Clutha is called a prohibited district it contains a licensed publichouse, and a wholesale liquor store, so that the residents are not altogether dependent on the sly-grog sellers for their liquor.

The casualties during the past year have been as follows: Retired on medical grounds, one first-class detective; resignations, one third-class constable; while eight members of the Force have been punished for minor offences.

With few exceptions the conduct of the police of all ranks in this district has been satisfactory, and considering the numerous duties those members of the Force in charge of stations have to perform outside their duties as constables, it is highly creditable to them that they have been so successful in keeping down crime, seeing that their police work has often to give precedence to other outside duties.

Many of the police-buildings are old and in constant need of repair to keep them habitable; while others are in the same state from faulty construction. A summary of needed repairs, with their probable cost, is forwarded you with this report.