



WAVERLEY COUNCIL

POLICE MURDERS

A Waverley Library
Local History Fact Sheet

On Saturday 3 January, 1931 Bondi Junction was the scene of unprecedented and horrific violence. Police Constable Ernest Andrews (22) and Police Constable Norman Allen (29), were killed while attempting to detain an armed and disturbed man.

On the day of the murders, John Thomas Kennedy (42) had been seen to be behaving strangely. That morning he went to Mick Simmons Ltd, a shop on Oxford Street armed with his repeating rifle and bought cigarettes and cigars. As he hurried towards the shop entrance without paying, he told the staff to “charge it to the Government” whilst brandishing the rifle above his head.

Constable Allen of Waverley, who was directing traffic at the time, observed this behaviour.

Allen approached Kennedy who levelled his rifle and shot him fatally three times through the chest.

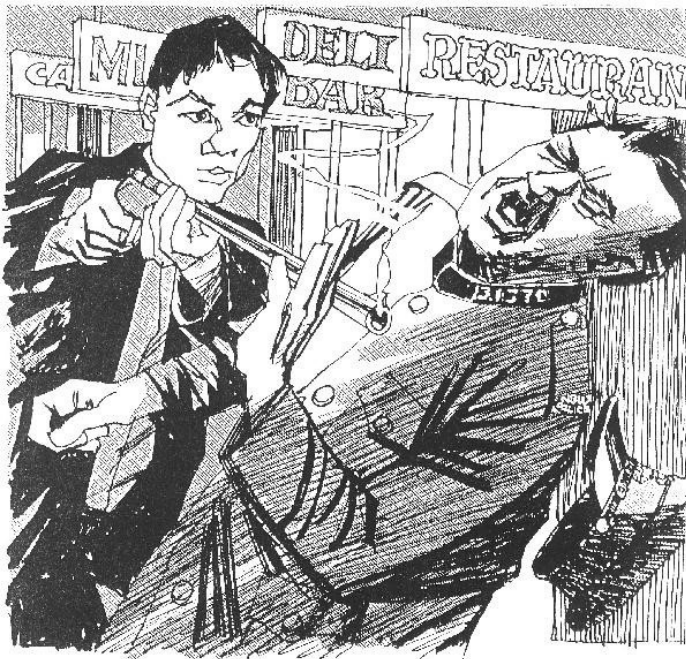
Constable Andrews from George Street North Station was off duty at the time, and on his way to Bondi Beach. On hearing the news of the tragedy, he set off in pursuit to Kennedy’s house at 54 Lawson Street, Bondi Junction. On reaching the house Andrews made for the back door, when Kennedy appeared. Andrews was shot twice, and mortally wounded. He struggled to reach Kennedy, who produced a knife and then stabbed him in the throat.

Meanwhile, Sergeant Seery and Constable Johnson from Waverley Police Station had arrived at the front door.

Images from top:

Constable Ernest Andrews, image courtesy of NSW Police.

Constable Norman Allen, image courtesy of NSW Police.



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Images from top:

Newspaper illustration of police murders, 1931.

Front page of The Sun, January 3, 1931.

Kennedy opened fire, and during the ensuing battle Constable Johnson shot Kennedy through the chest. Kennedy later died of his wounds in St Vincent's Hospital.

WHO WAS JOHN THOMAS KENNEDY?

As a boy Kennedy loved toy soldiers and joined the militia as a teenager. He became a highly skilled printer, becoming one of the few colour printers of his day. Standing all day printing took its toll on his legs, giving him serious and painful varicose veins at an early age. This medical condition forced his early exit from the militia.

When World War I broke out he was one of the first to enlist, but the condition of his legs caused him to be rejected. With most men of his age and younger going off to fight, Kennedy undertook a painful and expensive series of operations to have the varicose veins removed, but still the army turned him down.

His boyhood dream of becoming a soldier was disappearing, and Kennedy continued to brood over his rejection for army service during the war. His depression was compounded by the white feathers sent to him, accusing him of cowardice.

The notion of a white feather representing cowardice goes back to the 18th century, arising from the belief that a white feather in the tail of a game bird denoted poor quality. To 'show the white feather' was therefore to be 'unmanly'. For those men who remained at home, including pacifists, the effect of being presented with a white feather was often one of shame. For a patriot like Kennedy to receive one was the ultimate humiliation.

Although Kennedy had spent a successful nine years with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, his inability to serve in the war effort continued to weigh on him.



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Images from top:

Funeral procession of
Constables Allen and Andrews,
Image from the Sydney Mail, 7
January 1931.

The passing of his mother while he was in Canada contributed to his deteriorating mental state. Neighbours residing in the immediate area were well aware of Kennedy's strange behaviours and habits. He was often observed wandering around the streets muttering to himself with his rifle tucked under his arm. Residents were too afraid to inform the police, fearing personal reprisals. Kennedy was often heard parading inside the house and shooting in his backyard.

An examination of Kennedy's home after his death revealed that he lived alone. The house was sparsely furnished and contained only the barest amenities and necessities. In every room investigating police found open boxes of cartridges containing many rounds of ammunition, sufficient to withstand a lengthy siege.

A diary with disjointed entries indicated Kennedy's disturbed state of mind. At the rear of the house a portion of the yard had been used as a miniature rifle range, with the cement wall of the house being scarred with

countless bullet markings. Gardening implements had also been used as targets.

It is thought that at the time of the shootings Kennedy believed that he was shooting German soldiers. Even as he lay dying in hospital he turned to his brother-in-law and said, pointing to the constable at his bedside: "There's another German I have got to fix up!" (Sunday Pictorial, 4 January 1931, p.3)

THREE DEATHS, THREE FUNERALS

Constables Allen and Andrews received full police funeral honours. The internments took place at the Church of England section of Rookwood Cemetery, where both officers were buried side by side. Thousands of spectators came to pay their respects to the constables as the cortege made their way from Wood Coffill's Funeral Parlours in George Street, to the mortuary siding at Central Station. From there, the bodies were transported directly by train to Rookwood Cemetery.

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Only a few relatives and friends attended the funeral of John Thomas Kennedy. The time of the departure of the hearse from the funeral parlour in George Street was kept as secret as possible. The internment took place in the Roman Catholic section of Rookwood Cemetery where a full service was held at the grave (Sydney Morning Herald, 7 January, 1931, p.10).

The government of the day, appalled by the grim circumstances of the tragic event, and disturbed by the huge public outcry which followed concerning the ease of purchase of automatic weapons, promised an immediate revision of the existing gun laws and amended legislation where necessary to avoid repetition of a similar tragedy (NSW Police News, May, 1992, p.20).