

Police Department

Inspector's Office

Ballaarat

17th October 1854

Sir,

I hasten to submit to your notice the following particulars relative to a serious outrage which occurred this day and which resulted in the total destruction of the house and property belonging to a Mr. Bentley Landlord of the Eureka Hotel, he being the person who was lately acquitted upon a charge of murder, the depositions of which taken before the magistrates I

James Scobie

Mr and Mrs Bentley

Mooney

547/54

Put away

Captain MacMahon

Actg Chief. Commr. Of Police

Melbourne forwarded to you on 13th inst.

On Saturday last placards were posted throughout the Diggings to the effect a Public Meeting would be held on Tuesday at 12 o'clock near Bentley's Eureka Hotel on the spot where the late James Scobie was murdered; for the purpose of considering the best means to be taken for the conviction of the murderer and also to have a demonstration of public feeling with regard to the manner in which the case has hitherto been conducted I made several enquiries from the persons whom I was informed were the principals in convening the meeting relative to the exact object they had in view, and I was told it was merely to petition for a rehearing of the case to higher authorities in Melbourne and with the exception of the fears expressed by Mr. Bentley himself I could not learn from any person that any serious outrage was contemplated.

In consequence of a request from Mr. Rede the Resident Commissioner this morning I had all the available Force at my disposal in the immediate neighborhood of the site fixed upon for holding the meeting and placed some of the Police inside of the House. I myself attended at the meeting but did not permit any of the men to be seen in the Crowd.

I was accompanied from the Camp to the meeting by Mr. Rede and Mr. Commissioner Green who was to view the proceedings together with a Witness and to act as a Magistrate in reading the Riot Act if it was necessary.

The speeches at the meeting were not in the slightest degree objectionable, it was merely to petition the Government for a rehearing of Bentley's case and the speakers endeavoured to impress upon the minds of the people the necessity for preserving peace and order.

When the meeting was finished a mob of some ten thousand persons from all directions collected in front of Bentley's Hotel and commenced throwing stones & various missiles of every description at the House and also at the Police who were trying to protect it by every means in their power." "I summoned all the Police at my disposal to the spot "Bentley's Hotel" at this moment but I found it impossible to preserve order or to deter them from destroying the premises. I called upon Mr. Green the Magistrate and asked what he wished to be done & recommended that the military should be sent for.

At this stage of the proceedings Mr. Rede and Mr. Amos another Commissioner appeared and addressed the people who would not however desist they set fire to the premises on several occasion, and which was extinguished by the Police but owing to the concourse of persons assembled and the Buildings being of wood and canvass the whole property was eventually destroyed by fire.

The military were present but were not called upon to act by the magistrates except to try and protect the property.

The Police also were not called upon by the Magistrates to fire and I am of opinion it would have been impolitic for them to have done so, for with the numbers opposed to our small force and the state of excitement pervading the minds of the people, much more serious mischief might have ensued and it must have inevitably ended with serious loss of life.

In conclusion I have to observe that the Police exercised the very greatest of forbearance under the peculiar position in which they were placed.

I have the honor to be

Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

Gordons Evans

Inspector of Police