

# ELECTRIC SHOCKS !!

## Bridged a Meter -- and Came a Cropper!

Before Mr. A. E. Burt, R.M., in the Albany Police Court last Monday, Christian de Rink, licensee of the Premier Hotel, was charged by the Albany Municipality, that during the month of March, 1931, he did wilfully and fraudulently prevent the electric light meter at the Premier Hotel from duly registering the amount of electricity supplied, thereby fraudulently consuming electricity, contrary to Sections 31 and 34 of the Electric Light Act, 1892. He pleaded "Not Guilty," and conducted his own defence. Mr. G. A. Cooper prosecuted for the Council.

In expectation of some amusement the gallery rolled up in force. Whether the comedy was on the expected plane we cannot say, but some of the defendant's decidedly original opinions provoked much merriment.

Joseph Harold Verran, a linesman employed by the Albany Municipal Power House, was the first witness. He said he had read the meter at the Premier Hotel for many years, and

Premier Hotel for many years, and in March, 1930, defendant remarked to witness that in the next month his account would be less than 50 units, and offered to bet 5/- on it. Subsequent readings, showing large reductions, made witness suspicious, and he tested the meter, but could find no fault with it. He then recommended that the meter be changed and in February, 1931, a new meter, which had not previously been used, was installed. The other meter which witness referred to as meter A, was exhaustively tested and found to be accurate. It was installed in a cottage at Middleton Road and had registered properly there. Meter B, the new one, recorded a low consumption and was in turn replaced with a meter taken from Bevilaqua's shop (Meter C). Meter B showed scratch marks on the base plate when examined after removal from the Hotel, and it was very unlikely that they could have been inflicted by an employee of the Council. On March 21 of this year, witness accompanied his brother, W. J. Verran, Mr. Mercer, and the Town Clerk (Mr. Duthie) to the Premier Hotel, and they saw a metal pin which had been inserted through one wire and making contact with the other wire, below the meter. The effect of such a pin would be to cause a short circuit,

would be to cause a short circuit, which would prevent the meter from registering accurately. If the pin pressed tightly on the lead in, it would completely stop the meter, but a light contact would just slow it down. It was a **very effective bit of work**. The pin was not in evidence during witness' previous visits, or he would certainly have seen it. When it was withdrawn, the marks on the lead wires were invisible to the naked eye. Constant insertion and withdrawal of the pin could have caused the scratches on the base plate of meter B.

Continuing witness said he and his brother read the meter every day for several days until defendant stopped them, when the matter was reported to the Town Clerk. During the period March 6 to March 14, meter C registered 22 units, equal to the entire consumption for the previous month. The meter apparently worked normally during this period.

Witness was searchingly cross-examined by the defendant, and denied that defendant had ever requested him to change the meters because they were faulty.

W. J. Verran, brother to the previous witness, and also a linesman and meter reader, corroborated much of his brother's evidence. On March 23 he spoke to de Rink, and asked

23 he spoke to de Rink, and asked him to come with him to read the meter. De Rink showed him a bent metal pin, with the end broken off, and said he broke it to see what it was made of. Defendant also said he would like to catch the man who had been mucking about with his meter.

Cross-examined witness said the meters were changed on instructions from the office, and not because of any request by the defendant.

Defendant: "What meter is on now."

Witness: "A 5 amp A.G."

"Is it right to have a 5 amp meter on a 20 amp circuit?"

"No."

"That shows you don't know your work!"

The witness did not appear to be greatly disturbed.

Defendant poured a barrage of questions at the witness, but could not disturb his equanimity.

Defendant: "You were alone when you found the pin?"

Witness: "Yes!"

"You could have put the pin in yourself."

"I could" (Mr. Cooper laughed and was sternly rebuked by the defendant.) To Mr. Cooper witness said any boy with brains could test meters after three months' experi-

meters after three months' experience.

Defendant questioned the witness' qualifications and explosively commented that "He was not an electrician; he was only a labourer."

David F. Mercer, Assistant Town Clerk, said his duties included keeping the electric light ledger, and making out the accounts for current. A careful check was kept on the consumption of current at the Premier Hotel in the latter part of 1930 and the early part of this year. On several occasions the reader was told to check his readings.

Last February defendant commented on the size of the January account (97 units) and said he had been away, and that if he had been home it would have been much smaller, that the staff must have been wasting current. On March 5 De

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Rink brought the February account to the Council office, and said there was something wrong with the meter as the account (22 units) was too small. Witness replied: "There is something wrong, but not with the meter!" (Defendant made a comment, audible only to the witness, who smiled very sweetly.)

Witness said he told the Engineer, Mr. Adderley that he thought the

meter was being tampered with. The next day the meter was changed. On March 21 witness was present when Verran indicated the pin connecting the leads, below the meter. He saw Verran indicate to the Town Clerk the effect the pin had on the meter.

Defendant: "You are just an ordinary Clerk?"

Witness: "Yes, just an ordinary clerk!"

"Where did you learn about meters? Everybody over there knows about meters."

"You know all about them apparently."

Defendant fully explained his conception of the witness' duties to him, witness listening intently.

Vincent James Duthie, Town Clerk of Albany, gave corroborative evidence. On March 21, after seeing the pin in the lead he asked Mrs. Wilson if De Rink was in, and when she said no, he explained what had been found, and asked her to tell De Rink. He went to see De Rink on Monday, March 23, after Verran said defendant would not permit him to read the meter. It was absolutely false to say he removed the pin from the wire in the presence of the defendant.

Defendant cross-examined regarding the pin. His question was rather obscure, and the witness asked

ther obscure, and the witness asked him to make it more clear. "You are an electrician and I am not," he remarked.

Defendant: "Where is the pin?"

Witness: "You should know. You took it out!"

Defendant (shocked): "Do you tell stories like that in your position?"

Joseph Henry Adderley, engineer in charge of the Municipal Power House, gave evidence regarding the effect of a bridge on the meter. The bridging of meters was not a new dodge, and was a common offence when women wore hatpins. Witness thought it unlikely that the use of smaller globes, etc., would result in a saving of 800 units in twelve months at the Premier Hotel.

Mr. Cooper suggested a demonstration of how a meter operated, but defendant said it was not necessary and was chillingly rebuked.

Defendant asked witness about a conversation regarding the meter. Witness said De Rink said the consumption looked ridiculous, and he replied: "Yes, you must have forgotten to tell them to take the dope out." De Rink said: "Do you think I am interfering with the meter?" Witness answered: "I don't think so; I know!"

Giving evidence on his own behalf, Christian De Rink said he was lying

Christian de Rink said he was licensee and part owner of the Premier Hotel. On February 28 he returned from a visit to Perth and received an account for 18/4 for 22 units of electric light. He went to the Council Chambers and told Mr. Mercer that something must be wrong, as the consumption should have been higher. He suggested averaging the consumption over a period of some months, but Mr. Mercer refused, and said the meter would be changed. Witness tested the meter with one of the wiremen, and found that with one small lamp, it would not work. When he gave it a slight tap it worked. The wireman said it was stuck. The meter was changed a few days later. The accounts had varied very little since January. Sometime in March Mr. Duthie came to him and said: "Eh, Chris, they found a bit of wire or something on your meter. I told Mrs. Wilson on Saturday, but you were not here." Witness asked to be shown the pin and Mr. Duthie showed him a pin or a bit of wire hanging on the wire. Witness pulled it out. Witness said he had reduced his lights by one-third, and gave figures showing that the number of boarders at the Hotel was much smaller this year than last, showing why there was such a difference in the accounts.

the accounts.

To Mr. Cooper witness denied that he was an expert electrician, but said he was an engineer by profession. He had one trade, unlike the Council employees who had several, and were master of none. He was not up to the tricks of the trade, but knew more than the Council men (laughter).

Mr. Cooper: "Who, beside yourself, would have an interest in preventing your meter from registering properly?"

Witness evaded a direct answer, and said anyone could have done it.

Defendant left the box and became once more the defending counsel. He asked for an adjournment as he wished to call evidence to rebut the "untruths told by Mr. Duthie." (Laughter.)

Resuming on Tuesday, Mrs. Esther Elizabeth Wilson was called, and said she was part owner of the Premier Hotel. Mrs. Wilson said that Mr. Duthie spoke to her one Saturday morning about the meter. She did not tell Mr. de Rink, because he was away in Perth. On Monday morning she saw Mr. Duthie again and asked if he had spoken to Mr. de Rink, who returned on the Sunday. Mr. Duthie said "No," and witness advised him to do so. Mr. de Rink came in and Mr. Duthie spoke to him about the meter and they went un-

about the meter and they went upstairs. She did not know whether

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they went to the meter. De Rink had been absent from Albany for about a fortnight. Witness became very verbose when Mr. Cooper suggested she might be mistaken in the dates.

Mr. Cooper indignantly took exception to defendant making sotto voce comments as the examination was going on.

Witness did not remember a meter reader having a conversation with De Rink about the wire, on the Monday.

Mr. Cooper's patience was getting badly frayed, and he again took exception to remarks interpolated by the defendant.

Norman Reginald Grove, yardman at the Premier Hotel gave corroborative evidence.

Mr. Cooper asked for a withdrawal of three other charges in respect to December, January and February. This was granted. Mr. Cooper said the case was perfectly clear and rested simply on the fact that the meter was interfered with during March.

Defendant, in his address, bitterly attacked the Council's employees ac-

attacked the Council's employees accusing them of inefficiency. The personal tone of his remarks brought him into frequent conflict with the Bench. Defendant spoke interestingly of methods of bridging meters, before going on with his tirade of abuse of the Council employees, suggesting that James Verran had inserted the pin in the wire himself. The R.M. refused to hear him any further, and rebuked him strongly for his abuse.

The Magistrate, reviewing the evidence, said the main fact was that the pin was put in, and interfered with the registering of the meter. It was evidently put there for that purpose. De Rink's suggestion that Verran put it in was ridiculous. In this particular case, said the R.M., the onus was on the defendant to prove his innocence, contrary to the usual practice in British law, which required the prosecution to prove guilt. Who would be likely to bridge the meter, considering that a definite reduction of registration was effected? The reasonable presumption was that the person who would gain most would be most likely to do the act.

Defendant had not convinced him of his innocence said the Magistrate, and he must be punished. He would be fined £15, with £11/3/- costs. Default was fixed at three months'

**Default was fixed at three months' imprisonment with hard labour.**

**Defendant immediately gave notice of his intention to appeal.**