



Vincent Pike was born in Shepton Mallet, Somersetshire, England, on 4 February 1827, the son of James and Mary Pike. His father was a tinman. Little is known of Vincent's early life other than that he was a linen draper when, in the parish of Trinity, St Philip and Jacob, Bristol, on 7 September 1846, he married Frances Elizabeth Renwick, daughter of Thomas Renwick, a hatter. They were to have a family of four sons and one daughter. The spelling of the surname was altered to 'Pyke' soon after the marriage.

The Pykes emigrated to South Australia in 1851, then moved to Victoria where Vincent mined for gold at Mt Alexander until 1853 when he opened a store at Montgomery Hill, Forest Creek, Castlemaine. An effective advocate of miners' rights, in 1855 Pyke was elected as a representative for Castlemaine district in the Legislative Council; with H. S. Chapman he urged the introduction of election by ballot. In 1856 he was elected to represent Castlemaine Boroughs in the new Legislative Assembly, and in 1857 was appointed Victoria's emigration agent in England; a change of government meant that Pyke never took up the position. In late 1859 he became warden and magistrate at Sandhurst, Bendigo. Resigning in 1860, Pyke was again elected to represent Castlemaine Boroughs, and subsequently held the offices of commissioner of trade and customs, commissioner of public works, president of the Board of Lands and Works, and several other civil service positions.

In 1862, for reasons of both health and finance, Pyke arrived in Otago, New Zealand, where on 26 May the provincial government appointed him a commissioner charged with organising a goldfields department. By June 1862 he had submitted a proposal for regulations for the Otago goldfields, whereby they would be administered by a centralised organisation (headed by Pyke) rather than by locally elected mining boards. Although the government deferred these proposals, it did issue the detailed mining regulations Pyke prepared. Based largely on Victorian precedents but modified to meet Otago's particular conditions and requirements, these regulations formed the principal basis on which the goldmining industry in New Zealand developed. On 23 December 1862 Pyke's title was changed to secretary of the Gold Fields Department; his role, much to his chagrin, remained essentially administrative until May 1863 when executive responsibility for the goldfields was

transferred to the department. Pyke remained secretary until 1867 during a period when the department endured criticism for protracted delays, failure to consult miners, and administrative muddle. In 1865 Pyke led an expedition which discovered a route from Lake Wanaka to the West Coast, a feat accorded public recognition in 1866.

In 1867 the general government resumed administrative control of the Otago goldfields. Pyke, who had been appointed a justice of the peace and resident magistrate in 1862, was also appointed warden on 22 July 1868, initially for the Dunstan and later for the Tuapeka goldfield. In 1868 he chaired an Otago provincial government commission appointed to draw up new mining regulations. Sensitive to the incipient conflict between miners and settlers over the alienation of land on the goldfields, Pyke had earlier, in the Gold Fields Act 1866, contributed significantly to the modification of the land settlement provisions of previous mining law; however, his plea that limits should be placed on the compensation payable to runholders whose lands were resumed for settlement was not heeded.

Pyke returned to Dunedin in 1873 to follow a career in journalism. He founded the *Southern Mercury* in late 1873, and commenced publishing the *Otago Guardian* in early 1874. In 1873 he stood unsuccessfully for the provincial council electorate of Tuapeka, but was later elected MHR for Wakatipu. In 1875 he became MHR for Dunstan, which he represented until 1890 when he lost to M. J. S. Mackenzie in the contest for the enlarged Mount Ida electorate. In 1893 he was elected to represent Tuapeka. He was also active in local politics. In 1877, having contributed significantly to the formulation of the Counties Act 1876, Pyke was elected to represent the Kawarau Riding in the Vincent County Council, and served as chairman until 1882. That the county took his name was the outcome of what was reported to have been a 'grim joke', the House of Representatives declining to name the new county 'St Vincent'. Pyke drew up the county seal whose motto, *in haec vincimus* (in these things we go forward) expressed much of Pyke's political philosophy and priorities. Pyke's tenure of the chairmanship was marred by an unseemly quarrel between Clyde and Cromwell over designation as county town; his failure to honour an alleged promise to Cromwell resulted in his effigy being hanged by the Cromwellians and finally flung into the Clutha River to the accompaniment of 'a suitable dirge' from the town's brass band.

Throughout his political career two major issues - land settlement in Central Otago and the Otago Central railway - occupied much of Pyke's attention. As the pastoral leases granted under the 1866 Gold Fields Act began to expire from about 1878, Pyke in 1881 established the Otago Central Land League to pressure the government into ensuring an effective subdivision and closer settlement of the land involved. He exerted further influence through the Otago Pastoral Leases Committee of 1881. Bitterly critical of the runholders, whose actions, he insisted, had transformed the 'paradise' of Central Otago into a desert, Pyke denounced the outcome of the auction sales of pastoral leases (in which most of the original lessees retained their runs), supported limitations on the area any runholder could lease, denounced 'dummyism', and sought to expose the alleged involvement of banks and loan companies in land speculation.

Although the Otago Central railway was first mooted in the early 1870s, Pyke emerged as its tireless advocate, its 'sleepless guardian': he resolved a dispute over possible routes in favour of the Strath Taieri route, marshalled local support, and turned the first sod at Wingatui on 7 June 1879. Although Pyke envisaged the line reaching Lake Wanaka and the West Coast within a few years, construction proceeded fitfully, leading to the formation of the Otago Central Railway League in 1893, with Pyke as its first chairman. By 1894 the line had reached Hyde, but had not yet penetrated what Pyke described as 'the garden wall' of the Rock and Pillar Range to the riches of Central Otago beyond. Pyke's energetic advocacy was recognised in 1899 by a gift of 200 sovereigns from his constituents and Dunedin business interests.

Throughout his political career Pyke contributed, often with passion and foresight, to other important issues. He supported the abolition of provincial government; opposed South Island separation (attracting opprobrium as a 'traitor' to his province, although by 1885 he had changed his stance); advocated state support for Catholic schools; defended free trade; and proposed a confederation of the Australasian colonies and, indeed, of all English-speaking communities. Never a party man, Pyke attached greater importance to his political independence and to provincial and national issues.

Pyke was also writer, journalist and businessman. He published handbooks on Otago (1868), local government law (1882), and mining (1892); produced two novels, *The story of Wild Will Enderby* (1873) and *The adventures of George Washington Pratt* (1874); and wrote stories, one of them composed, for the sake of a bet, in Lowlands Scots. In 1887 he brought out his *History of the early gold discoveries in Otago*. He also produced a paper on the extinction of the moa. From 1883 to 1893 Pyke lived in Dunedin, where he was a regular contributor to the *Otago Witness*. Pyke was involved, in 1888 or 1889, in an unsuccessful attempt to amalgamate the rich Matakanui goldmines into a single venture and float it on the London market. Greater success attended his efforts to form the Roxburgh Amalgamated Mining and Sluicing Company in 1889, involving the merger of several small mining concerns to form one of Central Otago's more enduring and productive sluicing companies. To his political and business interests Pyke added an involvement in the Anglican church, the volunteer movement (securing a captain's commission) and in Freemasonry - he was installed as right worshipful grand master of the Lodge Otago Kilwinning in 1863. He had a passionate interest in gardening and promoted the planting of trees throughout the district.

A portly man with a fondness for alcohol, Pyke did not enjoy good health. He was, nevertheless, a vigorous debater, lecturer and raconteur, and possessed a formidable memory and an incisive wit. Blunt and honest, he mixed freely with all, including 'the poorest miners in their frosty camp', and indeed was held in genuine affection by Central Otago's many small mining and farming communities. He was also of uncertain temper, erratic and imperious, capable of sustained invective, and could display both foresight and stubbornness. A practical and versatile man, Pyke enjoyed an immensely varied - if materially unrewarding - career, making a significant contribution to the formulation of mining law, the development of the mining industry, and the settlement of Central Otago. He was one of Otago's ablest politicians and most effective advocates.

Pyke died at Lawrence on 4 June 1894 aged 67 and was buried in Dunedin's Northern cemetery. His wife Frances died in Clyde on 6 May 1898, and was interred in Clyde cemetery.

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