

Village bobby

Additional information compiled by Mike Hall

1. Police officers who served in Wheathampstead between 1914 to 1918 and their role in the Great War.

Pc Alban Henry FREEMAN was born around 1889 in Wheathampstead and was raised here. He was appointed as a Constable on 10th August 1914 and enlisted in the army on 10th December 1915; he was placed on Section B Army Reserves and returned to his police duties, possibly in Wheathampstead but maybe further afield as one of his arrests and subsequent court case appeared in the Hertfordshire Mercury on 17th July 1915. John George Skipp, a labourer of No Fixed Abode was charged with being drunk on Stanstead Road Hoddesdon on 8th July and Pc Freeman proved the case to the satisfaction of the Magistrate(s). The court was told that Skipp had 57 previous convictions which included 24 for drunkenness and he was fined £1 1s 0d or 13 days in prison. William Henry Hicks, an engine driver from Lower Edmonton pleaded guilty to being drunk and disorderly in Hoddesdon and explained he had been on an outing and had a drop too much. Fined £1 1s 0d or 13 days in prison.

On 10th August 1915 Pc Freeman and others received a rise in his weekly pay from £1.4s.6d a week to £1.5s 8d.

On September 10th 1915 Pc Freeman summoned one John Walker for driving a horse and cart without a light in Hoddesdon. The officer told the court that when he pointed out the offence to Mr. Walker, he said to the officer 'I should think you have enough to do looking after Zeppelins and bombs'. The court reported noted there was laughter heard around the court whereupon the court clerk replied, 'But they don't have them in Hoddesdon do they' More laughter was reported in court and after Mr. Walker replied 'No' he was duly fined what appears to be the going rate of £1.1s.0d

Clearly Pc Freeman was a busy officer and attentive to his duties as he appears yet again in the Hertfordshire Mercury on 29th January 1916. Frederick Goode of Edmonton crashed his motorcycle and sidecar, hitting a fence, overturning and ended up in someone's garden. Pc Freeman attended the scene of the accident and quickly concluded the Mr. Goode was under the influence of alcohol. He arrested him and he was taken into custody where the duty Inspector noted that Goode was 'mad drunk and would not be reasoned with!' However after a night in the cells, Mr. Goode (who was not all bad) put two shillings in the Police Orphanage box. He was fined £2.

Later that year in June 1916, Cheshunt Magistrates heard three male family members plead guilty to being drunk and disorderly in Hoddesdon. However they denied assaulting Pc Freeman in the execution of his duty. One of the males hit

the officer whilst another knocked his helmet off and sent it 'spinning down the road'. A hostile crowd gathered and tried to release one of the arrested men. More punches were thrown at the officer before the situation was resolved. Each defendant was fined 10s for drunkenness and 1 guinea each for assaulting the officer.

On 10th August 1916 Pc Freeman and others received a pay rise from £1.5s.8d to £1.6s.10d per week.

One last reported case in the Hertfordshire Mercury details how Pc Freeman came across John Harrington during the afternoon of 24th October 1916 in Bramble Lane; he noticed that his pockets were 'bulky' and a swift search revealed two dead rabbits, still warm with their necks broken. Pc Freeman seized the rabbits and Harrington used some 'strong' language to register his feelings for which he was also duly summonsed. He told the court he had seen the rabbits sitting on the bank and he was not going to pass them by. This caused much laughter in the court and when it subsided, the court clerk commented 'They were waiting for him' which caused much further laughter in court. Freeman was fined 10s on each summons.

On 18th November 1916 Pc Freeman applied to take the promotion exam from Second Class Constable to First Class Constable and he passed.

He was mobilised on 1st February 1917 and joined the Royal Horse Artillery as Gunner 205985 however his military career was cut short as he died on 7th March 1917 having contracted a fever. There was an outbreak of Rubella at Woolwich and his death was possibly from complications after contracting this disease. He is remembered on the Wheathampstead War Memorial.

Pc 142 Ernest Frederick James HAWTHORNE was born on 6th October 1893 at Hertingfordbury and was appointed as a Constable in 1914. He was stationed at Wheathampstead between 24th March and 16th June 1915 upon which date he enlisted as Trooper 438 with the 2nd Life Guards, Household Battalion. He was one of 96 officers who enlisted as did the then Chief Constable. On 25th August 1917 he was killed in action and is remembered with Honour at the Roeux British Cemetery in France.

Pc 297 Thomas Russell KEMPTHORNE joined with Pc Freeman and was also mobilised with him in February 1917. His army record shows he too contracted Rubella whilst in training at Woolwich but he survived the disease and the war, eventually returning to Wheathampstead and serving here between 1921 and 1926.

Pc 183 Percy Crispin GODFREY survived the war and was stationed in Wheathampstead between 1921 and 1926, he would have worked alongside Pc Kempthorne.

Pc 271 William Edward JAMES survived the war and served in Wheathampstead between 1928 and 1930.

Sources - *The information about police officers in Wheathampstead was provided by Paul Watts, a retired police officer who has conducted research into Herts Police Officers who served during the Great War.*

2. Ex Police constable assassinated in Dublin

William Frederick HUNT was born on 10th January 1886 in Bushey, Herts and was brought up and schooled in Watford before becoming a labourer. In September 1905 he joined the army and just a few months later in April 1906 he purchased his discharge from the army, in all probability so that he could join the police.

On 10th July 1906 he was appointed as Constable 248 in the Hertford County Police and was stationed at 'C' Division, Watford Police Station until October 1910 when he was transferred to 'F' Division Hertford Police Station. He had by this time married Miss Alice Mary Sibley in Watford in July 1910.

The census of 1911 however shows him living at an address in Watford and his occupation as Constable that seems to contradict his transfer to Hertford. On 14th May 1911 his daughter Doris Hunt was born and there will be more about her later.

His next period of police service was at 'G' Division Wheathampstead between 5th October 1911 and 1st November 1913 and it is likely that he and his family lived in lodgings in or nearby the village. Sadly there is no information about this two-year period of his life or details of his service.

He was posted from the village from 1st November 1913 and moved to 'D' Division at Northchurch until early in 1915. It was not unusual for officers to be moved from post to post every couple of years and this was the norm for constables until the 1960's. The rationale was that it prevented officers becoming too well acquainted with the locals and possibly not applying the law even-handedly.

On 1st June 1915 Hunt enlisted with the Royal Inniskilling Regiment and eventually landed in France with the regiment on 30th September 1916. In August 1917 he was commissioned into the Inniskilling Fusiliers and served with the 12th Reserve Battalion at Ballyhannon in County Armagh until 1st May 1918. Once again, details of his service in Ireland are unknown but as we shall see, he returned to Ireland after the war to a dark and very violent period of history. After May 1918 he transferred to Blackpool as Company Commander with the Royal Army Medical Corps before his final move in the army to Burma in October 1918.

On 4th December 1919 he was demobilised and applied to rejoin Hertford County Police but was rejected as being unfit. He didn't leave empty handed as he was granted a medical pension of £117 per annum.

William Hunt's whereabouts and movements after December 1919 are unknown but he next appears on record on the 6th August 1920 when he joined the Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary.

The ADRIC or 'Auxies' were born of an idea in September 1919 by the Commander in Chief, Ireland who proposed that the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) be expanded via the recruitment of a special force of volunteer British ex-servicemen. In May 1920, Winston Churchill, then Secretary of State for War, suggested the formation of a 'Special Emergency Gendarmerie' that would become a branch of the RIC. Thus, in July 1920 the 'Auxie's were born; the force would be 'temporary', members would enlist for one year and be paid £7 a week (twice a constable's rate). Unemployment was high at the time and joining the 'Auxies' may have been an attractive option. An advert in London at this time asked for ex-officers to manage coffee stalls at £2.10s (£2.50p) a week...five thousand ex-officers applied!

The ADRIC was recruited in Great Britain from ex officers who had served in the Great War. Among the eventual force of 1900 men, three held the Victoria Cross . The 'Auxies' were a heavily armed and highly mobile force and operated in companies about 100 strong. They focused their efforts in the south and west of Ireland where IRA activity was greatest. 'Auxies' wore either RIC uniforms or rebadged army issue uniform. A separate force comprised ex-soldiers from the non-commissioned ranks and they became known as 'the Black and Tans'. Both forces were to operate in a counter insurgency role to try to stem IRA activities. Both the ADRIC and the 'Black and Tans' became infamous for their violence, as did the IRA. Both sides committed bloody atrocities.

The 'Auxies' were considered much more effective at gathering intelligence about the IRA as evidenced by the murder of high-ranking IRA commanders during November and December of 1920.

William Hunt was appointed to ADRIC as a District Inspector (3rd Class) and became an Intelligence Officer within B Company based in Templemore Abbey, Tipperary. He appears to have earned a reputation as being an 'aggressive intelligence officer' and as such, became a target for IRA assassination. He was promoted to the rank of platoon commander until he relinquished the position at his own request and was posted to his depot from February to June 1921.

On 26th June 1921 William Hunt, his wife Alice and another couple were having tea at the Mayfair Hotel, Lower Baggot Street in Dublin when an armed IRA group gained entry, confronted the group and shot William Hunt dead. The other man was also shot and seriously wounded but survived. The IRA team stole the firearms both men were carrying.

One theory for the assassination of William Hunt is that whilst serving in the field, he might have been involved in the shooting of an IRA volunteer by the name of Mortimer Duggan in November 1920. Duggan was in a pub in County

Limerick late one night with others when two lorries carrying armed men stopped outside. The pub door was broken in and those inside fled out of the back of the pub. Duggan was shot in the back, the bullet penetrated his heart and he died instantly. The raiders were attached to Hunt's company, 'B' Company.

After the murder of William Hunt there were newspaper articles about the killing and four men who were said to be involved were actually named. Paddy O'Connor, Michael Stack, Peter Larkin and a man called Jim O'Neill or O'Toole. Most unusually, excerpts from written witness statement from three of the killers were published; how these statements were obtained and by whom is a mystery but they are in themselves an admission of pre-meditated murder and would have placed them at risk of being hanged for their crimes. None of the aforementioned was executed as far as I know and I have yet to find out if any trial ever took place.

Padraig (Paddy) O'Connor said that the IRA had intelligence about two 'Auxies' who were in the habit of having tea in the Mayfair Hotel in Baggot Street and instructions were given that they be 'eliminated'. The intelligence was provided by one Paddy Drury who was in touch with one of the maids who worked in the hotel. Paddy O'Connor assembled his hit team and on the day of the shootings, Paddy Drury made contact with the maid informant. She provided descriptions of the targets and where they were in the building; her role was to give access to the team when they gave four knocks and a ring on the doorbell. The plan went accordingly to plan and Hunt was shot dead on the spot while his friend was seriously wounded. Although no mention is made of her in the reports, it appears that Doris Hunt, then aged 10 years old was also in the room and was grazed by a bullet aimed at her father. The assassins made off from the hotel and were almost immediately pursued by a patrolling British armoured car that gave chase. They had an escape car lined up but it wouldn't start so they continued their successful escape on foot.

James Tully said he was a member of the team and his job was to dismantle the phone in the hotel while the others carried out the shootings. He said that Paddy O'Connor took firearms from both shot men and they all escaped to the getaway car that wouldn't start. Tully left his own gun in the car where it was found later.

Michael Stack said that Padraig O'Connor had selected him and others for the execution of the 'Auxies'. He confirmed that the maid in the hotel was friendly and helped the team.

We do not know what happened to the IRA men who carried out this killing. In January 1922 Alice and Doris Hunt were awarded compensation at the court in Dublin; Alice received £1,200 and Doris £1,500.

To all intents and purposes this is the end of these sad personal events and in 1922 the Irish Free State was born and life went on for Alice and Doris Hunt. In 1934 Doris was arrested for stealing a handbag from a shop in London and sentenced to six months imprisonment. She appealed against the severity of the sentence and in March 1934 her case was heard at the Court of Criminal Appeal

in front of the Lord Chief Justice. She explained to the court about the circumstances of her father's murder and said a bullet had grazed her leg during the attack. She went on to say that she was ten at the time and had never recovered from the trauma; she also pleaded that her intelligence was only that of a child of eleven. The court showed mercy and she was Bound Over for twelve months to be of good behaviour and ordered her to undertake to obey her mother and stay with her.

Doris became a minor film actress and by 1939 she was living at an address in Park Lane, London; later she emigrated to the USA where her mother joined her. Doris was married five times and moved amongst New York society, mixing with the likes of Paul Getty and the Kennedys. She and her mother lived in Park Avenue, New York and from the date of William's death, Alice had been receiving pension payments from Hertfordshire Police amounting to 22s 8d per week (about £1.11p).

By the 1980's, Alice Hunt was approaching her 100th birthday and had the honour of being one of the oldest persons still receiving a Hertfordshire police pension. She was visited by Hertfordshire's then Assistant Chief Constable, Mr. David Handley (while he was on holiday in the USA) and, amongst other things, she asked him if she would be likely to receive a telegram from The Queen to mark her 100th birthday. Mr. Handley made sure that the telegram was duly sent to Mrs. Hunt on her birthday. Alice died shortly afterwards on 27th November 1985 some 64 years after witnessing the murder of her husband in Dublin at the height of sustained and vicious violence from both sides of the conflict.

Sources - *Mr. Paul Watts, Historian and retired Hertfordshire Police Officer, Wikipedia, www.theauxillaries.com.*

3. Police houses

The Hertfordshire Mercury reported in July 1918 that Herts. County Council had agreed to purchase two cottages in the main street in Wheathampstead for £750 for the accommodation of police constables 'for which purpose they were in every way suitable'.

These cottages no longer exist but were sited opposite 'The Swan' public house on the junction of the High Street and Marford Road. Further research hints that the police may have rented these cottages before 1918. Photographs taken before the war show that one of the houses, built in the early Edwardian period, had a notice board by the front door, suggesting 'official' use.

Source - *Herts Mercury*

4. Under age miscreants

John brothers

In 1915 John Brothers aged 13 stole some cycle lamps belonging to the chauffeur of Mr. Lane- Claypon and was put on probation for six months. Mr. William Ward Lane-Clayton was a wealthy banker and at some time in his life, a Magistrate.

John Tebb and Frederick Hale

In April 1917 two eleven year old boys, John Tebb and Frederick Hale were summonsed before the County Court for larceny (stealing) of money from another boy and larceny of money and chocolate in Harpenden. The boys were already on probation for another offence and while the outcome of this particular case is not known, the chances are that they were dealt with quite harshly, especially by modern day standards. In 2018 in similar circumstance, the boys would never have been taken to Court.

In November 1917 John Tebb Frederick Hale were in court again having stolen a soldier's dinner from a field. John Tebb's father told the court he didn't want his son sent to an industrial school while his mother said she would take responsibility for the boy future good behaviour. The pleas were to no avail and John Tebb was sent to the East Barnet Industrial Home until he became sixteen years old. This Industrial Home was also known as Church Farm and had been licensed to receive boys sentenced by the courts since 1863. It was a working farm in the early days but expanded over time into other areas of training for the boys. Seventeen years before there is a record that 37 boys were engaged on farm work; nine were house boys including bakers; 14 worked in the needle room; six were tailors; six were shoemakers and six worked in the wood shed. The boys also received an education on a daily basis and the routine around 1900 was strictly regulated throughout the day.

5.30am	Out of bed and into class until 7.45am.
7.45am	Breakfast and play until 9am
9am	Work on the farm or in the house until 10am
10am	Work in the house or on the farm until midday
Midday	Studies until 1pm
1pm	Dinner followed by play until 2pm
2pm	Work with some play until 5pm
5pm	Gym, drill or band practice until 6pm
6pm	Supper followed by play
9pm	Bedtime

There were organised activities for the boys; they had a football field, library, swimming pool, bands and their own Cub and Scout groups. Many of the lads

went on to join the army later in life and I would like to think that young John Tebb left that place and made a good life for himself.

Frank Hale

Another Wheathampstead boy called Frank Hale was sent to Church Farm in 1918 when he was just 10 years old. He and another boy called Norris Richmond who was nine had stolen a lunch basket and contents valued at 2/2d (10p in today's money). Constable Maltby told the court that Hale had been under his supervision for some months and he was 'a tiresome boy' who was beyond his mothers control. Hale's father was out of the picture serving with the armed forces; the court sent Frank Hale to Church Farm until he reached 16 years of age. In 1933 Church Farm became designated as an 'Approved School' and no doubt went on to influence many young lives.

Samuel Plain

On Boxing Day 1918, Samuel Plain aged 15 years old appeared at the Court in the Town Hall in St. Albans; he had been working for 10 days for a Mr. Frederick Wright and had stolen a gun from him to the value of £2 which he then hid on Nomansland Common. Samuel appears to have gone on the run because he was arrested in Kettering and brought back to St. Albans. He was sent to a reformatory school until he was 19 years old. The difference between an Industrial School and a Reform school was basically the strictness of the regime there and the criminal history of the children sent there. Reform school inmates had to follow very strict rules and had few freedoms; they had already been found guilty of crimes and would be considered as juvenile delinquents. Reform schools cannot have been nice places! The idea of Reform Schools goes back to the mid 1700's when the 'Marine Society' was founded "for the purpose of clothing landsmen and boys for the use of the King's ships, and as an expedient to provide for poor boys who might become a nuisance".

Industrial Schools were mainly for children who had not yet committed crime but were thought to be in circumstances that might make them do so in the future.

Sources - *Wikipedia/ Herts. Advertiser*

5. Motoring offences

In 1921 Fred and Charlie Collins were summonsed before the County Petty Sessions Court in respect of offences against motoring regulations. They did not appear in person but wrote apologising for their non-attendance on account of business calls. The letter went on to draw attention to the fact that people who were willing to work hard and help the State were harassed over minor motoring matters; other were free to draw the dole and enjoy their lives in idleness.

Fred was accused of driving a car without lights and said it had been an exceptionally light night and he exercised his discretion to drive the two hundred yards to his home without a lighted lamp adding his actions were “no danger to anyone”.

Charlie was accused of riding a motorcycle with no rear number plate and Fred told the court that he had sent the number plate to the blacksmiths to get it straightened out. Charlie only rode a half a mile on the bike to deliver a message and the police knew that the cycle was properly registered and was fitted with a front number plate.

With a fine turn of phrase, Fred asked the court to take into account this comment...*“with the present state of trade and employment, what encouragement is there for us to endeavour to respond to the Prime Ministers appeal for employing reserve demobs when at present all your endeavours are hampered as such trivial matters as these. We both commenced work the very day we were demobbed and have practically done twelve hours or more every day since knowing every £1 we earn means about 14 shillings (70p). Yet we get not so much consideration as the army of unemployed!”*

The police did not contest the written explanation in the letter and Earl Verulam, the presiding Magistrate took a lenient view and order the brothers to pay only the costs of the case (maybe a few shillings).

Sources - Anne Collins/ Herts News 17/6/1921