

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - September 2007

Policing the Village

Cameron Floate recounted his experiences of Policing the Village at the September meeting of the Wargrave Local History Society.

Cameron had joined the Oxfordshire Constabulary in 1951, being too short for his home county, Hampshire. Due to housing problems, he transferred to Berkshire in August 1956, and was posted to Didcot.



On the 26th November 1956, he moved to the Police House in Wargrave, where the family were greeted by Wilf, Clifford and Joan Maidment with tea and cake. That first night will never be forgotten. Up to that point they had not had a telephone in the home. Tired from the move, they went to bed only for the telephone, beside the bed, to ring about 1 am. It was Paddington Police Station, an au pair from the Chota Hubra Dog Kennels, Crazies Hill/Warren Row, had missed the last train and wanted Cameron to advise the proprietor of her whereabouts. Luckily, with the aid of the telephone directory and the manual telephone exchange, the message was passed on.

The Police House was built in 1905. By 1956 the gas lights had been replaced with electricity and a bathroom added. With no central heating or hot water, it was a cold house. The bathroom had a gas geyser. The house had a dining room, sitting room, kitchen, larder, three double bedrooms, an office, with a heavy wooden door to an outer cell, complete with a coke tortoise stove. Leading from the outer cell, there was a proper cell complete with low wooden bed and toilet pan. The cell was never approved, although it was said that a previous Constable had put a prisoner in there overnight and was chastised for doing so.

It took a month or two to acclimatise to the area and learn the road names - none of the roads having name plates! The duties were normally 4 hours in the morning and 4 in the evening /afternoon and occasional nights. Transport was a motor cycle at Twyford and the Sergeant had his own car. We cycled every where; if a vehicle was required, it came from Sonning or Wokingham. There were no radios as such, except for a few traffic cars. Contact was made to P.C.s by making pre-arranged "points" for 15 minutes at telephone kiosks or public places. Good points, especially in the winter, were the Railway Station Booking Office, a farm office at Scarletts Farm, Scarletts Lane at night time only. Crazies Hill did not have a telephone kiosk, so Cameron used to stand outside The Horns public house. Wargrave Beat was Wargrave, A4, Hare Hatch, Knowl Hill up to the Seven Stars public house, Crazies Hill, Bowsey Hill, Loddon Drive / Borough Marsh, A321 to Twyford Roundabout and to Johnson's Hill / Conways Bridge, which had a board each side - "At Conway's Bridge, Mind the Ridge, Single File, For Just a while". There were

telephone kiosks at Wargrave crossroads; St George and Dragon; Queen Victoria public house; Victoria Road, outside number 165 (Highfield Park side of the garage) - which was then the Upper Post Office; an AA box on the A4 in the lay by just on the Maidenhead side of the Twyford roundabout and the A4 Bath Road at Knowl Hill by the lane leading to Knowl Hill Common.

Life at the Police House was 24 hours 7 days a week, including rest days. When Cameron was out on patrol, it was expected that Georgia would answer the telephone, answer the door, issue Receipts for Found Property, and be a second (unpaid) policeman!

In the early years Cameron cycled everywhere, come rain or shine and I walked and cycled the village, talked to people and was seen. The duties were varied, some happy, some sad, but mainly mundane day to day. The local lads used to call him "Old Floatie". He had to supply his own typewriter and cycle, but was paid an allowance for ribbons, pen, ink, batteries, cycle and boots. On the whole, the allowance covered most of the items, but certainly not for the cycle. Tyres were torn to pieces on the stone roads of Loddon Drive, Borough Marsh, Crazies Hill up to Bowsey Hill and Braybrooke Road - the whole length.

One lunchtime some boys came up the front path with a very large brindle coloured dog. Georgia advised them that it had to be taken to Twyford as the kennels were there. Further examination of the dog revealed it was a Shetland pony, so it was tethered to the apple tree in the garden, until claimed by the people at The Red Cottage.



In the 1950s, Twyford was issued with an Austin A35 van (with windows), but no radio, which was used mainly by the Sergeant. Then at the end of 1959, Cameron was issued with a Velocette 200cc motor cycle, UMO 30. Much to the amusement of the local lads in particular, he had to display 'L' plates as he had not passed the test, and had to ride it around, on duty, for the statutory 'L' plate period, 3 or 6 months. He was mortified. Eventually a radio was fitted (callsign HA40) but it was not very efficient, and he still had to make the 15 min points! The snag with the motor cycle was that Cameron was more mobile, could travel further afield and in some ways lost some of the parochial ambience. In the late 1960's, the Velocette was replaced by a Morris Mini van.

Following fatal accidents, sudden deaths and drownings, Cameron had to arrange the Inquest, held in the Sansom Room. The rule was, the Inquest was held in the Parish where the person was certified dead. H.M. Coroner required the typewritten report of the Death by the next day!

Every year, the Superintendent, two Sergeants and the County Architect inspected the house and garden, whilst on another day, they would visit to inspect the uniform. Each time, every thing had to be neat, tidy, garden cultivated and hedges neatly trimmed.

In April 1975 Cameron was promoted to Sergeant at Maidenhead and the family left the Police House in August 1975 - he retired from the Police Force in 1981, having completed 30 years service. He revealed that there are many other 'incidents', which he could not quote, as the people involved are still alive or in the village.