

Death of Ex-Inspector Lee

Former Reigate officer's police record
Funeral at Redhill¹



¹ Surrey Mirror 25 November 1927 page 5

We chronicle with regret the death of Mr Henry Lee who for thirty years was a member of the Reigate Borough Police, from which body he retired on pension in July 1909. Mr Lee who was held in wide esteem, went to reside at Godstone for a short period after his retirement from the Police Force, but returned to Redhill where he was a familiar and respected figure. Mr Lee, who had been in failing health for about five months, died on Friday last at 18, Osborne Road, Redhill, at the age of 71 years.

Ex-Inspector Lee who was a native of Merrow, near Guildford, had many interesting experiences during his lengthy association with the police force, and on more than one occasion received commendation for exceptional services rendered. He spent some four years of his early life on a farm and subsequently a short period in gardening, the love for which he always retained. Seeking occupation further afield he joined the Metropolitan Police in 1874 when he was 19 only years of age, but only served for two years and then transferred his service to the Surrey County Constabulary, being stationed at Guildford and Woking.

Early Days In The Borough Force

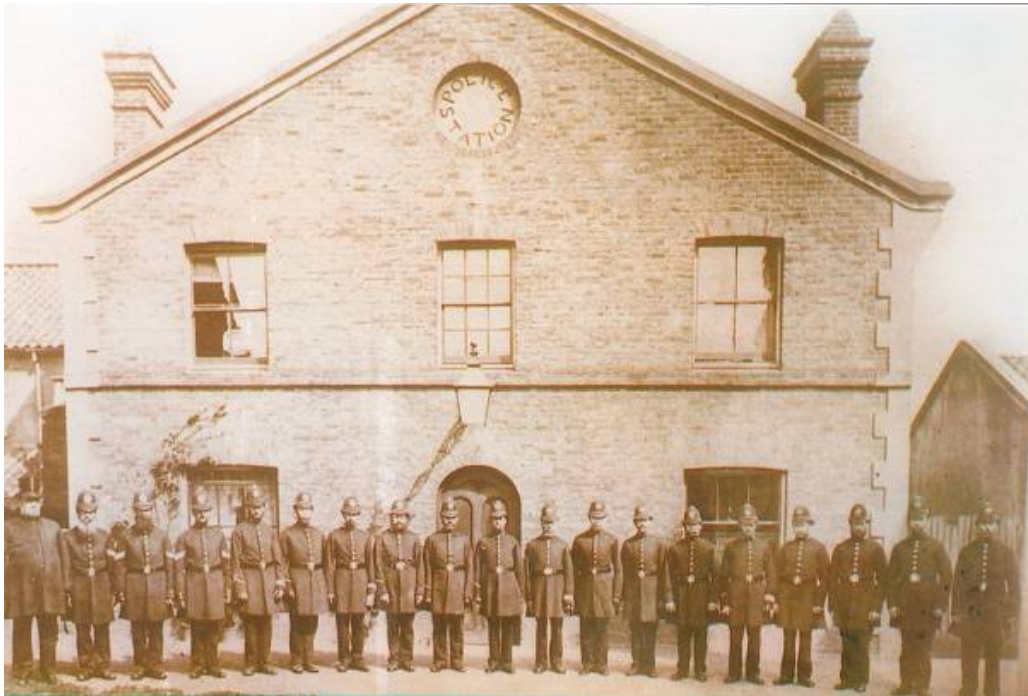
Mr Lee joined the Reigate Borough Constabulary on February 16th 1878 at the time when Mr Rogers was Head Constable, and when the police force numbered 20 members only.



Head Constable Rogers

There were four sergeants but no inspectors in those days. Mr Lee described himself as the last of “the thin blue line” his most cherished possessions including three photographs of members of the force, one taken outside Redhill police station in 1879 when Mr Rogers was Head Constable, consisting of only one line; a second one taken

in 1892 when the force had sufficiently increased in numbers to have a second line; and the third taken early in the present century when the numbers allowed of a third line being arranged in the group. Mr Lee was the last of those who appeared in the first photograph to leave the force. He was unfortunate to fall victim to typhoid fever the year after he came to Redhill, that dire malady raging with considerable vigour in the borough at that period. Upon his recovery he was sent to Earlswood to do duty when that place was made an out-station. He remained there two years rendering public service by tracking down a housebreaker in Woodlands Road and arresting a man at he Philanthropic Farm who it was discovered had served 24 years in prison.



Reigate Police 1879 Carlton Place Police Station by the Market Hall in Redhill



Reigate Borough Police 1904

Smart Arrests

Mr Lee, naturally during so long a period of service in the borough had many interesting experiences and in his early connection with the force played a signal part in allaying the public mind at Reigate in connection with a number of burglaries that disturbed the peace of that end of the town. These assumed such serious proportions that the aid of Scotland Yard was invoked, but that authority deemed it to be a matter for the local police to deal with. PC Lee as he then was, was sent over to do duty and speedily got on the "scent". The second night a house was broken into and an alarm given at about 2am, but the burglars got away. Instead of retiring at the usual time PC Lee remained on the beat until daylight, making investigations" on his own", and searching the neighbourhood. It had been snowing and in the course of his investigations he found the end of a silk handkerchief peeping out of the snow from the ditch. This proved to contain the stolen articles and housebreaking implements and a loaded six chamber revolver were discovered. The thieves were at once suspected but some delay ensuing in getting authority to search, they left the borough and Reigate was unmolested from that date, a happy circumstance due to the vigilance of the subject of this notice. In 1887 a number of burglaries and robberies occurred at Redstone Hill and Holmthorpe and PC Lee was put on the beat. It was not long before another house was broken into, and tracing footprints to Warwick's Wold and Caterham, he discovered some of the stolen goods and afterwards apprehended the thieves at Godstone.

Distinctions and Commendations

For this smart piece of work he was awarded the merit class and badge. As a Police Sergeant Mr Lee again secured the distinction of merit in 1895 when he arrested a notorious burglar named Johnson on the railway line at Reigate for burglary at Hillbrow and Dodds Road. The Mayor speaking at a meeting of the Council after that capture said it was felt both by the old and the then Watch Committee that the capture was one that called for a commendation and should be made an example to other officers of the force. Mr JT Sanders seconded the motion, which was heartily carried that Police Sergeant Lee should be raised to the merit class. Three months later Sergeant Lee secured a big haul arresting a man on Redhill Common at 1am for breaking into a house only two doors from the sergeant's residence. A cartload of property was found at the man's house at Godstone and other places.

Somewhat singular circumstances surrounded the arrest of a man in 1897 for doing wilful damage at a large house on Reigate Hill. The man, it transpired, had been a servant at the house and at nightfall entered the garden, chopped down the tree, visited the greenhouse, throwing a large number of flowering plants prepared for exhibition at the Reigate show, to the ground. The place presented a scene of indescribable confusion. The manner of the tracking of the offenders was somewhat singular one. It appeared that the man occupying the field adjoining the gardens was in the field later that night attending a sick cow, and he observed a man in the grounds, the man having discarded his boots before getting over the wall, and in the end a conviction followed with a sentence of 12 months imprisonment. An "old bird" and "ticket of leave man" named Nichols was arrested with the aid of PC Good for burglary at Morningside, Reigate in 1898, receiving sentence of five years penal servitude as punishment for his act. On that occasion Police Sergeant Lee as he then

was, was the subject of eulogistic reference in the Press, being described as “an expert burglar catcher” and referred to in terms of high eulogium. The light of his lantern disclosed the fact to the sergeant that the pantry window had been broken and an arrest speedily followed. The officer also distinguish himself in the capture of other burglars at a later date, on one occasion being made the recipient of the some of £1 1s by the Watch Committee in recognition of his smartness in bringing an offender to justice.

Early Ambulance Work

Mr Lee was one of the first members to join an ambulance class in the Borough – in 1888- when this instruction was not looked upon with the favour which it has since been regarded, the members of the class having to join of their own initiative and contribute to their own instruction. He received his certificate in 1888, Dr HW Ewen being the surgeon instructor. Mr Lee was possessed with an unassuming manner but the Reigate Police Force has never been served by a more efficient and conscientious officer and he retired from the body not only with the best wishes of his former comrades, but of the residents of the borough he had served so well.



Inspector Lee

The Funeral

The funeral took place on Wednesday at the Baptist Tabernacle, Redhill followed by the internment in Reigate cemetery, when a large number of friends of the deceased attended to pay their last respects to him.

Note a long list of family and friends followsThe Reigate Borough Police was represented by Inspector Spain, Inspector Hood, Police Sergeant Forster, Police Sergeant Parker and PCs Claydon, Wing, Barnett, Bedell, Morse, Smith and Alderson. There was also present ex-Sergeant Talbot and ex-Sergeant Rossman, ex-PC J Gadd and these with the representatives of the Southern Provincial Police School ex-Inspector Hodder and Mr. W Botting, marched in front of the cortege as it proceeded from the church to the cemetery.