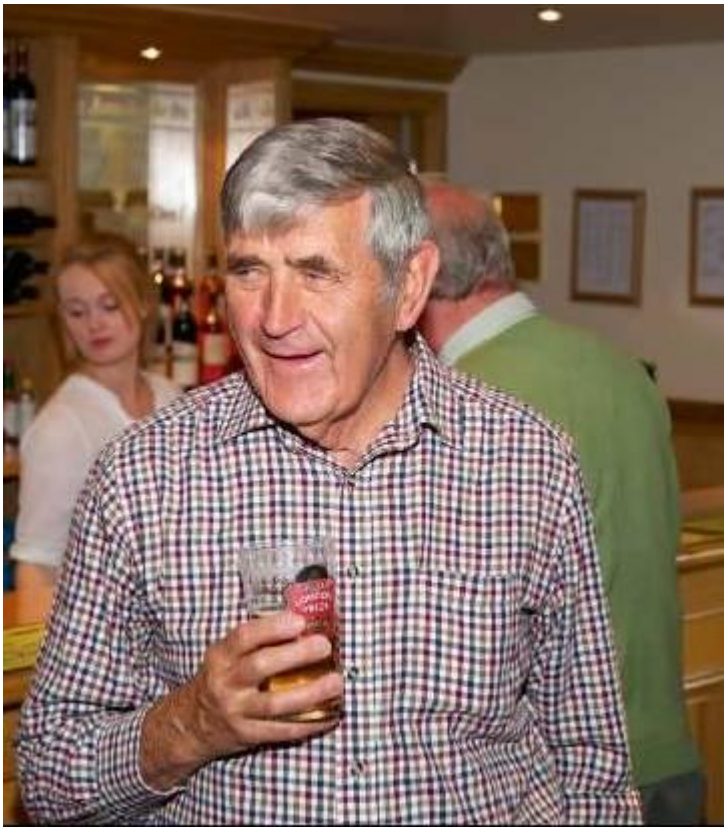
"Memories"

John Stone Retired Police Sergeant 821



In 1961 I was assistant manager in F. W. Woolworths at Camberley, a company where I had worked for 9 years since leaving school. Shoplifters were a problem, and D.C. John Over (later to become Chief Constable of Gwent) regularly dealt. On one occasion I must have been having an off day, for John suggested I join the police. That year I had been moved on promotion from the West Ealing store, given an extra 10 shillings (50p) per week, and no help with travel or accommodation, so I was a bit fed up. Anyway, having discussed it with my wife who thought it was a good idea, John set the ball rolling for me.

I remember going into Camberley Police Station and taking a very basic (maths, English and general knowledge) entrance exam. I was stuck on an author question but managed it with a little help from the duty sergeant at the time. My, they must have been desperate for recruits. Then it was up to stores in Woodbridge Road in Guildford for kitting out. I had a Lambretta scooter at the time and a couple of days before this I was stopped in the Metropolitan Police and reported for a defective front brake. I was of course worried but Sergeant Ball said not to worry, just plead guilty, which I did. Not long after that we were sworn in at Guildford Guildhall.

In December it was off to Sandgate, our main Instructors being Will Squires (drill) and punchy Wallis (P.E.), with our class tutor being Sergeant Hill from Kent. Mondays were a bit of a pain, for it was then we were tested on our definitions which we had to learn, but apart from that it was generally good fun. I had done National

Service of course, which did help. Most weekends we were allowed home, and we would hire a car. Usually I travelled with Dave Morris, Dave O'Connell and Ian Somerville. We were late back on a couple of occasions due to weather and were marched into the Commandant's office (Superintendent Brown) for a rollicking. The passing out parade was something special and our wives had come down for the occasion, having met in London all wearing I think red roses so they could find each other.

I was posted to Camberley where I was shown around by Mick Kenny. The Sergeants I remember were Ken Crafter, Vic Mansell, and Stan Plummer. The Chief Inspector was Bill Ezzard. First job was to be taken by Vic to the cycle shop in Camberley so I could buy a bike. I think we got 2/6d (12 1/2p) for using a bike on duty. My wife and I first lived in a flat in Heatherdale Road (owned by a Brigadier Churchill) and then a second flat on Crawley Hill (owned by a Brigadier Luck) – no slumming it for us! Saturdays the worst duty was on the old A30 directing holiday traffic at Cambridge Hotel traffic lights, usually for 2 hours. Will Squires tuition at Sandgate came in well here. The night duties spent cycling around was pretty boring, but there was an all night café on the A30 county boundary which was always useful. We were expected to submit a fistful of vehicles seen at night forms, and all we had if we wanted to stop any suspicious vehicle was a torch, with not even a fluorescent jacket; obviously no Health and Safety in those days. No personal radios then of course either, we just made conference points at public telephone boxes each hour. If we wanted to contact the station we rang without putting money in, and if the station officer was on the ball he would ring you back. Occasionally, very occasionally, we would be met there by a supervisor. Stag Beetles (attracted by the light) were always a problem and it was best to get inside the box to avoid them. One of the first calls I got at a point, was to attend a cot death. No Sergeant came out to offer guidance but Jim Mundell who was a divisional motorcyclist turned up and gave me the benefit of his experience. Without his help I think I would have floundered a bit.

During that awful winter of 1963 we were moved into the old Police Station in Hersham. It was an "H" shaped building with a house on each end, the corridor between being a cell block, the cells being used for storage of found cycles and other junk. There was a brick toilet block in the front garden where we used to hide the front door key, which was about 9" long, to the Police Station. The Sergeant was Dolly Stratton, and he had a rota of jobs to be done during the 2 hours a day (one in the morning and one in the evening) there was someone in the office. Cleaning the windows, polishing the brass, polishing the floor, and tidying the garden were some of the jobs. In the other house were Margaret and Frank Howell (transferred to Sussex). Other PCs were Jock Burke and Harold Wallis, who was a war time reserve. The house was freezing, just coal fire in lounge, and a gas geyser over the bath, and the downstairs toilet was always frozen up. When Dr Bennett visited one day to see our first born Jeremy, he refused to examine him upstairs saying it was too cold. There was ice on the INSIDE of the old style crittall windows.

Hersham was quite a busy section. Our court was at Chertsey, and on court days (Wednesday) it was quite common for all of us to be cycling the 5 miles there to give evidence for offences such as stealing road lamps, cycling on the footpath, cycles without lights, two on a bike, document offences, and offences in connection with

Road Traffic Accidents. Another long cycle ride was the 4 miles to the A3 at Pains Hill where we had to make the occasional point at the AA box.

After much report writing and inspection by the chief superintendent we were re-housed three years later in Meadowside, Walton on Thames in one of six police houses. Hersham Police Station which was once a divisional station for the Metropolitan Police was demolished soon after we moved to Meadowside and four police owned terraced houses built on the site. Ray Thrumble was the previous tenant of the house we were allocated. From then on I worked at Walton, cycling in each day in uniform. The sergeants then were John Harrington, Rowley Cise, and Bill Andrews. Inspectors were Alan Tugwell and Mick Skinner. The Chief Inspector was Johnny Lowman. There was a Social Club and bar over the garage at the rear of the Police Station where we had many pleasant evenings. I often crewed the area car (J36) and it wasn't long before I managed to get on a motorcycle driving course, and became a divisional motor cyclist (J70) sharing the Triumph Twin 500cc bike with Mick Richardson. Personal radios were still fairly new and unreliable, so the divisional motorcyclists were always very busy dealing with most of the sudden deaths, accidents, 999 calls, outlying enquiries, and even checking pig movement licences on local farms. In 1968 I was on leave awaiting the arrival of our second child, when we had those terrible floods. I remember seeing commuters walking down our road with their trousers rolled up and carrying their shoes. I did a number of stints of acting Sergeant, and in October 1970 I was promoted and surprisingly enough I remained at Walton. Peter Matthews said it was because of my involvement with the Scouts in Belmont which wasn't too far away. Walton was another very busy station with many celebrities living in the area including John Lennon, Tom Jones, Englebert Humperdink, Charlie Drake, Elton John, to name a few.

In the autumn of 1975 I was summoned to H.Q. to see John Over, the then Deputy Chief Constable. Asking me if I knew why I was there I said, "there's obviously a move in the offing". "Yes" he said "I want to send you to Haslemere." I hadn't a clue where it was. He suggested I took the following day off to visit with my wife, and to ring him the day after. We called at Haslemere Police Station and the first person we saw was Chris Stemp who had been stationed at Weybridge, and who I knew, who gave us a tour round in the area car, showing us the schools, hospital, etc. We fell in love with the place straight away and the next day I rang John Over and told him that we would take it, and not long after that we moved, the start of 16 years real community policing.

There were 12-15 constables there, 2 sergeants, a D.C., a typist, and a station cleaner. The sergeants occasionally had to help out at Godalming either as duty or custody Sergeants, and fairly often had to prosecute at either Farnham or Guildford, getting the papers the night before, but generally we were left alone. Being able to mug up on the cases before court was fine, but sometimes you would get a bundle from one of the other courts that had got behind. That wasn't so easy. The station was open 0800-midnight, with a section car out 24 hours, plus quite often a beat P.C. until 2.00 a.m. It was only after the Chief Constable Peter Matthews died that I heard from his wife that he referred to me as the Chief Constable of Haslemere. What an honour. He was a good Chief Constable at least you knew where you stood with him. He had a soft spot from Haslemere and would often call in on Christmas Day. Haslemere was a place where we were very much respected (even loved) by the public. Bats or squirrels in the house, locked out of cars or houses, we would do our best to deal, and this gratefulness was shown at Christmas time by the amount of "thank you" presents left at the Station. The raffle was almost as big as the Police Ball raffle, so most of the Section and their wives would have got something.

There was a great social life with most held at Godalming Police Club, but we did sometimes have socials at the Fire Station. We had socials with the S.C.C. depot staff, some of the big firms like Clembros, the Post Office, and banks. We would play darts, shove ha'penny, and bar skittles. If there was an organised event at the Club with a band, disco, or comedian we would support that too. We also had a rounder's team, and through the local paper would challenge teams from wherever to take us on. There were plenty of challengers, and throughout the summer on a Wednesday evening on the sports ground at Polecat, we would take them on. Didn't matter about the winner (sometimes we didn't know) but the home made wine, French bread and cheese went down well afterwards and all for 50p a head.

Reading all the above you may get the impression we were a soft lot, but we ran a very tight ship, and dealt with our own prisoners. No C.P.S. in those early days wanting an 80% chance of a conviction. Even if the evidence was a bit slim, if we thought the offender was guilty we would charge him/her and give him/her a run for their money. Invariably they would plead guilty. We were very firm though and anyone breaking the law was dealt with, even parking infringements. Unfortunately, later on, with all the P.A.C.E. rules we were not allowed to deal with our own prisoners, and had to take them to Godalming.

Once a year we would run a Police Ball, usually on a Friday until 2.00 a.m. and on the same night as the Senior Officers' dining in night at H.Q. Sir Peter Matthews and a number of Chief Superintendents would turn up rather late, but we would have reserved a table for them. The balls were always a sell out; with a brilliant raffle thanks to the generosity of local businesses, and the proceeds were donated to local charities e.g. Chiddingfold Youth Club, Wey Centre Youth Club, Holy Cross Hospital, Hindhead children's' home, and many more. We received some marvellous publicity through these events.

John is standing second from the left

The Sergeants would normally be invited to the Town Mayor's reception, and other civic functions and church services, sometimes, but not always to give a talk, though at one church service I had to read the lesson. I was invited to a British Legion dinner at the time of the Falklands War and was expected to give a vote of thanks. No problem, but my wife was expected to do the same for the ladies, and she was terrified. After weeks of rehearsing her few words though, it went off alright on the night.

After Tony May retired there were a number of Sergeants at Haslemere including Dave Miller, Vernon Eydman, Barry Wilding-Webb, and Bob Knowles, and around 1985 there were Inspectors posted to Haslemere including Chris Farmer and Steve Buss. Things changed then, the Police Ball stopped, as did the Wednesday rounder's challenges, and the enthusiasm for other social events seemed to have diminished. It was a great pity, for I had always said that "we had some fun, but we got the job done". Nothing suffered.

At the 1st Grayswood Cub Headquarters recently the Assistant District Commissioner (Cub Scouts) John Stone, presented the Cub Scout Leader Wayne Richardson, with the Scout Associations Highest Training Award, the coveted 'Wood Badge'. This is the hallmark of trained adult leaders and is awarded by the Chief Scout Sir William Gladstone.

John is a Sergeant at Haslemere and Wayne is a Constable stationed at Godalming.

Reformed in February, 1976, with just six boys, the pack now numbers twenty-seven. During 1977 they won the 'Muir Trophy' awarded to the best overall pack in the district. Wayne is assisted by his wife Kay and Joe Dunn, who is also stationed at Haslemere.

Seen in our picture are members of the pack and its leaders before leaving for a day's outing to London.

Despite this I look back on my 16 years at Haslemere with pride. The 16 years passed very quickly and it was time to go. I spent a couple of hours on the clothing stores computer one day, listing everyone I had worked with and noting their present station, determined that I would have the best farewell do ever. Invitations were sent out to everyone I had known, and at the Haslemere Scout H.Q. it really was something

special, not just Police but many local people turned up too. On my last day the Section had got hold of a double deck bus with Jarrow on the destination board. We did a tour of the town and ended up in the Georgian Hotel for a drink.

Still living in a Police house we decided to move to Jarrow where my wife had a brother and sister and other relatives (she was a Geordie). After another 18 years we moved back in May 2009. Sadly my wife died 6 months later, but I still organise the Haslemere Police re-union each May and so am still in touch with many of mine and my wifes old friends and colleagues.

One thing I do know, and that is Policing has changed dramatically, and not for the better. I certainly would not want to serve now but it was good while it lasted.


LUC 291


POLICE

Haslemere reunion with John the organiser in the centre

Reunion 2008

Reunion 2011