

Constable Elijah Cowen

Elijah Cowen was born in Chilwell, near Nottingham in 1866. His mother named him after a family friend, which unfortunately gave the erroneous impression of a particular religious leaning. The family were in fact of Anglo-Irish stock.

At the age of 22 he came to London, joining the Metropolitan Police. In 1887 he went into training, and following completion of the short course he joined the force on 30th January 1888 with a warrant number of 73299. Until the 1930's it was the custom for men not to join the force until after training.

Posted to "E" Division, and working out of Bow Street and Hunter Street, he was allotted the number 125E. His days wearing that number, if any, were few, as by 1892 he was wearing the number 68E on his collar and using it in his reports.



He was joined in London by his wife, Fanny, (a name she hated) also from the East Midlands - Lincoln. They initially lived in police flats that family lore states were not their liking but the address is not known.

Elijah's pocket book, dating from his days on "E" Division, survives, filled with the minor incidents that he met upon his beat, as well as arrest reports it is an insight into the minutiae of day-to-day policing at that time. It reflects the high proportion of night work undertaken by police in those days in that most entries are timed between 10p.m. and 7a.m., in the period 1892 to 1894. His writing is legible, and his spelling good. It is known that officers who joined many years after Elijah resorted to using schoolchildren to write their reports for them on occasion, but he appears not to have done so.

In 1888 he was serving in an area with strong links to the murders of prostitutes undertaken by the 'Ripper.' One document that survived in his effects was a spirit reproduction of a letter written to assist the Scotland Yard detectives in their attempts to find the killer. Although little credence has ever been placed in the somewhat rambling assertions contained in the document it is an interesting survivor from the times.



On Tuesday 22nd June 1897, Elijah, who was by now living with his wife in the more acceptable police quarters at Tankerton Flats, Kings Cross, was employed upon duties for the Royal Diamond Jubilee Procession. Unfortunately we do not know his exact posting on that day, only the end result. He allotted a fixed posting, presumably a traffic point on the route. In those days such a post required the officer to remain where placed, regardless. He was not relieved during the whole day, which may have been as long as twelve hours. Such was the oppressive nature of the regulations - and their enforcement- that he dare not slip away from his point, for fear of the consequences.

In spite of great pain brought about by an intense desire to answer the call of nature, he remained to the end. The result was severe damage to his prostate. Before long the injury affected his work, and came to the notice of the very senior officers he had wished not to come to the notice of on the day, and the police Chief Medical Officer. Elijah was within an ace of being caste from the service. He had served nine years and was not pensionable. As fortune had it, and probably due to the injury being caused on duty, he was offered another post within the force that was to take him to live in Waltham Abbey.



The docks and Government owned armament factories had been the responsibility of the Metropolitan Police for some years. One of these, the Royal Gun Powder Factory in Waltham Abbey provided a post with less arduous duties than faced on the beat. The bonuses were toilet facilities close to hand, and a welcome sum of 7/6d weekly extra. This extra 'Danger Money' amounted to a 20% pay rise.

Elijah moved his family, now including two daughters, from Kings Cross to a new home in Kings Road, Waltham Cross, and took up his duties as P.C.383N. His uniform remained the same as that worn by his 'street' colleagues, with the small addition of a pair of crowns flanking his collar numerals.

As a memento of his service at Bow Street he retained his old numerals, and pocket books (some were later lost) as well as memorabilia of the day that had so drastically changed his life. In addition, he sported the 1897 police Jubilee medal, worn on those days that he paraded in his number 1 uniform. He was later to add the 1902 and 1911 Coronation Medals; neither denoted any more than service in the force on the due date of the Coronation.

Pay in those days, issued in coin on Wednesdays, was partly in the form of gold sovereigns, for which Elijah had a set of scales which have also passed down with his collection of artefacts.

He moved his growing family to live opposite the church at 3 Monkswood Avenue in Waltham Abbey. In spite of the death of his second daughter, Cecilia, at the age of five, Irene, the eldest had been joined by Edna (1899), Stuart (1902) and Maurice (1905).

Elijah was due for pension in 1913; he stayed on to gain an extra one shilling weekly on his pension, staying on until October 1914, wartime. His pension amounted to £69.11.6d per annum, which included a proportion from the War Office.



*Part of the Elijah Cowen Collection in Epping Forest District Museum
It includes his notebooks, medals [1897, 1902 and 1911], along with a map of Queen Victoria's Jubilee route*

Still suffering from his prostate problem, Elijah sought what he hoped would be a satisfactory medical solution at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Smithfield, City of London. In

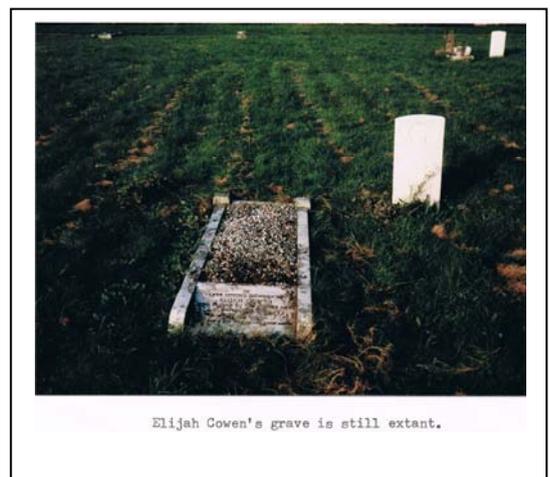
early 1915 he attended the hospital and underwent an exploratory examination of his bladder and then returned home to Waltham Abbey. Travel to and from the hospital in those days was a very difficult undertaking. Partly due to the war, he had to walk to Waltham Cross railway station and from Liverpool Street, not particularly great distances for a person both fit and well but a great strain on Elijah.

Upon his return home he was found to be suffering few ill effects from the examination and the compounding travel. Overnight however a different story came evident. The catheter examination point bled severely. Shunning that assistance that may surely have been available from his ex-colleagues, he again undertook to travel to the hospital in the same fashion as before to get treatment.

During the time he was in the hospital, about a month, he underwent an operation from which he failed to recover, and died on the 6th March 1915. He was 49.

His wife and four remaining children, the youngest by now ten years old, buried him in what is now known as the Old Cemetery in Waltham Abbey on the 10th March. Unlike many of the period, his grave is still marked by a stone.

After his passing, the family mindful of the erroneous implications of the spelling of their surname changed it by deed poll shortly after Elijah's death to a new spelling of Cowan but there were more pressing matters at hand as the police pension due ceased upon his death, leaving the family all but destitute. Fortunately one of the police charities paid up the residue of that year's pension to Fanny, and in addition agreed to pay the sum of 2/6d [12½p] weekly to the family for the youngest (Maurice) up to his fourteenth birthday. An offer of a place in a police orphanage for him was declined. The family returned to Lincolnshire, where the payments for Maurice were delivered, quarterly, by the local police sergeant.



The children in their part helped out the financial situation by seeking employment in a local company, initially on war work. In 1921 the family returned to South London, before settling in Stansted, Essex in farming land now alongside the airport.