

## James Thomas Styles

James Styles was born at Chorleywood in 1892. He spent the first twenty-one years of his life in and around that Hertfordshire village. He sought employment as assistant to the gardeners in the large houses still abounding the area and learned a trade to which he would return in later life. One of his references that given by one of the house owners in December 1908 still exist with the family.

James made the break with gardening and eventually, on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1913 he joined the Metropolitan Police as a constable, being posted initially to Ilford, Essex. He was soon a member of the station football team for the 1913-14 season and has passed down a photograph taken of the squad for that season. Ilford was then on the 'K' Division.

All too soon the war clouds loomed, and he was whisked off to war. He returned to police work on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1919, as PC217M, stationed South of the river rather than the North-East he had left. After six weeks, he managed to arrange for a transfer back to more familiar parts of London, and on the 31<sup>st</sup> March he became PC668J stationed at Woodford. Although he is now no longer around to confirm it, it seems probable that each of the men returned from the war, he was given a notional posting, which was altered upon request. Again he was soon active in the sporting pursuits at his new station, both football and cricket teams eventually being led under his captaincy.

Promotion to the rank of sergeant in 1927 meant that he was to be parted from 'J' division for nearly six years; and his family for six months, whilst it was arranged for them to move from their Woodford home to be near his new post at Waltham Abbey six miles away. Sergeant 91N eventually found accommodation for the family in the town, which did away with his enforced journeys on days off.

With the divisional changes of August 1933, he exchanged the letter 'N' to return to being a member of the 'J' division, this time as PS 91'J'.

As a new war approached he put off the retirement to which he was eligible in 1938, and before long was caught in a spiral started by the September 1938 Munich Crisis, and drawing him into the war a year later. Once the war started he was effectively trapped in service until the end. He was it seems somewhat annoyed by his own tardiness in failing to submit his retirement request in March 1938. He settled into what he thought might be a short war.

The fact that his, and many others, hopes were to be dashed is of course well known, but there is little doubt that he would have been recalled to service as a recent pensioner in any case. And quite a memorable war it turned out to be, for him and the family.

Waltham Abbey was of course a real backwater in the war against the British Isles, the sum total of the enemy effort against the town was a bare speck in comparison with the Nation as a whole. Within that speck the Styles family were to grab more than their fair share of troubles.

It was a full year into the war before any sign of action affected the town, all the police had undertaken course after course, been involved in Civil Defence exercise after exercise, but were not to actually see a bomb fall until two years after Munich. After that first minor raid in September 1940 however, for a short while they were all busy.

Sergeant Styles was night duty in the vicinity of the station on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December 1940, when War Reserve Albert Newton announced from his post in the sand-bagged station doorway that the defences had succeeded in shooting down a plane in flames - hopefully one of the enemy. The crash site appeared to be near the Wake Arms in the forest. With memories of the previous crash there a year earlier - and that had been a daylight crash of a friendly fighter - and a hope that the new victim was the enemy, the Sergeant and War Reserve set off towards the glow on the horizon, taking with them the station's rifle.

The scene that presented itself upon their arrival was horrific, and put both of them off food for the rest of the day to come. They joined members of the Fire Brigade and Civil Defence who were fighting huge fires at the crash site in Lodge Road, Wake Arms. Before long each became distinctly aware of a smell, the sweet sickly aroma of roasting flesh, and then to further disturb their senses, they came upon scraps of the crew of the aircraft. Bits of uniform, and body parts hung from the trees and lay under foot. The military took over with the dampening of the flames and the arrival of daylight, to sort through the debris and collect the bodies of the four crewmen of the Junkers Ju88 bomber. This task was never completed, the parts of bodies barely filled a single coffin, and many remain to this day beneath the leaf mould of seventy autumns. Those remains that were found were initially buried with full military honours in Chingford.

Enemy activity in the area remained very spasmodic, and it was not until the advent of the Flying Bomb in June 1944 that any long term raiding took place. Known to the public as the 'doodle-bug' and officially as the PAC or 'fly', the machines hit the area regularly over a six month period.

On Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September 1944 at 9.35p.m., the family house at 20 Honey Lane was severely shaken and filled with dust and flying glass. Tiles fell from the roof to the front and rear of the terraced house, and for a few seconds it was as if the end of the world had arrived. Within minutes the NFS and Civil Defence had arrived in the street outside, with only their red and white vehicle lights showing in the gloom. A total of around 400 houses suffered that evening, and it was until midnight that the emergency services withdrew, satisfied that no serious casualties were to be found. Daylight on the Thursday explained the cause and effect.

A flying bomb had landed in the brook opposite the house, some 50 yards away. The main blast had fortunately been contained by the banks of the brook, but the blast had been quite sufficient to lift the roof completely off number 20 Honey Lane and its neighbours. The complete structure had lifted, and landed back upon the top of the building some three feet further back. The extent of the repairs required saw the family re-housed temporarily at Foxes Parade in somewhat less homely conditions. The only advantage being that it was far closer to the station in Sun Street.

The enemy took a hand in the marriages of his daughters, June and Joan. June was married on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1945, at the Abbey Parish Church. Not three days before, the area had suffered an explosion caused by a V2 rocket causing extensive structural

damage, and filling the church with copious amounts of very fine dust. The vicar had made at least one attempt to cancel the proceedings, but neither the happy couple, June Styles and Eddie Rymer, nor Sergeant James' Styles were having any of that, life would go on.

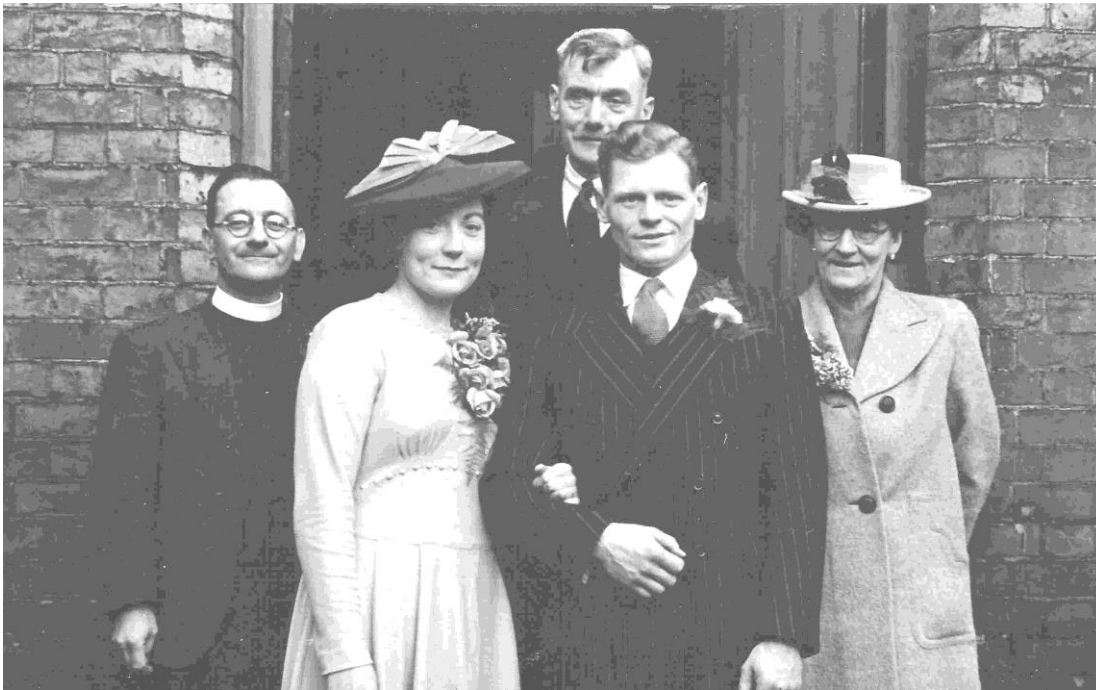
A further complication was the condition of the vicar, the Reverend Cleall. The Reverend, a former member of the local Home Guard, had just undergone a dental extraction prior to the ceremony. As a result, throughout the spartan ceremony, graced by a very difficult to obtain white wedding dress, the bride stood in a veritable dust bowl being liberally sprayed with bright fresh blood from the mouth of the vicar. He in turn was very conscious of his condition, and the great difficulty he was having with pronouncing the letter 'S.'

Joan's first marriage had been cut short by natural causes. Her husband' had died whilst serving with the Royal Air Force during the war but his death was not an act of war in itself. Her choice of a second spouse was to initially hurt Jim Styles very deeply.

By the time of her second marriage, in 1947, Jim was retired from the force at last.

The new spouse was a resident of a barrack establishment situated at 'The Breeches' along Galley Hill, to the North of the town. The former gun site was in use as a prisoner of war camp.

Kurt Andrae, ex-member of the Hitler Youth and for a very short time member of the Nazi Luftwaffe [German Air Force], was a very smart and handsome young man, the apple of many girls' eyes. Shot down on his first operational mission in the Mediterranean as a sixteen year old, he was working at that time in the nurseries that abounded in the Lea Valley. He spoke good English, learned before his enforced arrival. Unfortunately it was just that marriage of a patriotic policeman's daughter to any German so soon after the conflict was not everybody's idea of heaven.



*The Reverend Bishop married Joan and Kurt – in the presence of Jim and Jenny on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1947  
The Baptist Church, Fountain Place, Waltham Abbey, Essex.*

Time healed a great deal. Joan later served as the Station Typist at the Sun Street police station in the 1960's and 1970's, before being transferred to Chingford after a new station was built there.

On his retirement on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1946, James Styles returned to the earth, and made use of those skills learned prior to 1913. He was employed by Essex County Council as a groundsman/gardener at three Waltham Abbey schools. Waltham Abbey Primary, Upshire Primary and King Harold Secondary. From 1953 until overtaken by ill health he umpired for the British Legion Cricket Club.

James died on Monday the 13<sup>th</sup> June 1965 in the War Memorial Hospital, Farmhill Road. He left behind a son, two daughters and Jenny his wife for 49 years. He had completed over thirty years in the police service [rare at the time], survived the Great War and the Second World War, gained a 1937 Coronation Medal and lived his life to the full.

His funeral service in the [now dust free Abbey Church] was well attended, his remains were cremated.