

## Constable Albert Ross

Albert Ross was born in Liverpool during 1905, and thankfully he was young enough, barely in his teens, to serve in the Great War. He finally joined the army in 1925, spending four years in the Scots Guards.

Leaving the army in 1929 as a married man, Albert joined the Metropolitan Police, with a warrant number of 118521, and was posted to serve as PC 156G at the City Road police station after training. He served only three years at City Road before obtaining a, difficult to arrange, transfer to N Division on family medical grounds, announced in Police Orders dated July 6, 1932.

The subsequent interview with the divisional superintendent at Stoke Newington police station, then the divisional station, ND, for the 'N' Division, was far easier to arrange than the subsequent journey to attend the head station of the then Enfield Highway sub-division and then onto Waltham Abbey, the site of his new posting. Transfers in that period of the police service were quickly arranged affairs spanning no more than a few days from start to finish so there was the additional need to transfer his household from Finsbury to Waltham Abbey at a few days notice.

Soon after reporting to the police station in Sun Street, PC 641N, as he now was known, managed to find lodgings for his wife and himself in the town in an end of terrace house at 94 Rounton Road. He was to live there with his wife for the rest of his police service.

Albert held the new 'N' Division number for a little over one year. In late July 1933 Police Orders announced that as from August 1 there would be a massive re-organisation of a number of the existing police divisions, and that as a result, the Waltham Abbey section of N Division would be transferring from the Enfield Highway sub-division to that of Walthamstow and, additionally, to the 'J' Division. In this move, tying Waltham Abbey's future with Walthamstow and Chingford, a new number was allotted to Albert, 642J. In those days the majority of the beats were covered by either walking or the use of a bicycle. The days of the station issue bicycle had receded in favour of the payment of an allowance for officers to use their own for duty. Although there were rare exceptions to every rule, patrolling by officers was undertaken wholly alone and without the benefit of a radio, police boxes were not introduced until the mid-1930s. It is not to be said that there were no dangers in those days either, for it must be remembered that the murder of Essex Constabulary PC Gutteridge not five miles away at Stapleford was still fresh in everyone's minds.

It was during one of these solo pedal power patrols that Albert was enjoying the effects of gravity in assisting his passage down Crown Hill, Upshire, at speed. Unfortunately, a cat ran out in front of the speeding bicycle, was hit by the front wheel, and promptly dismounted the officer from his breakneck plunge down the slope. He hit the ground with a massive force, unlike a predecessor constable 25 years earlier, he survived unscathed .



*Albert ROSS PC 642J circa 1938*

When the war broke out in 1939 Albert was in his mid-thirties and able to choose to remain in the police service rather than rejoin the military he had left ten years earlier. Although the specialist training involved in remaining in the force was no less than elsewhere in the Metropolitan Police, it was fortunate that the pace of police and rescue work in the locality was not particularly taxing early in the war, even so whilst he was on night duty in October 1940 a block of houses half way down Rounton Road were destroyed by bombing that smashed a fair number of windows at his home. In the early years of the conflict the local police were tasked more often than not as an addition to the existing Civil Defence organisation in retrieving the inevitable debris of war from scores of souvenir hungry youths. Although he was unfortunately beyond recall at the time the question came up, it is believed that Albert was one of the police officers and civil defence workers involved in the first of the most grisly tasks to occur in the war.

The severe winter weather of 1939-40 served to halt any intentions of waging war in Europe with any degree of ferocity by both the Allies and the Axis until spring. Few airfields were able to operate their aircraft on a regular basis. It was after a period of severe weather that 151 squadron put up a few aircraft from the airfield at North Weald to enable them to exercise both man and machine in the skies above the snow covered landscape.

Three of the machines airborne chose to take part in aerobatics in the vicinity of Waltham Abbey on the afternoon of Sunday February 18, 1940. Hawker Hurricane L1724 was flown that afternoon by P/O 40724 Harold Arthur Lovell, a 19 year old originating from Morden, Surrey.

The resultant free "air show" that resulted from the practice interceptions undertaken by the three Hurricane's enthralled a number of the inhabitants on the east of the small town. It was not any sense of brilliance on the part of the performers, merely a combination of the warmness the flying instilled in a cold populace suffering from restrictions upon their heating and food with little else to divert their attention. Most of the flying, two against one, each taking turns, took place to the east by Honey Lane but they also teamed up to swoop low across the town from west to east along the line of Greenfield Street and Farmhill Road.

When it was Lovell's turn to take the role as the enemy, to be swooped upon by his compatriots, an error of judgment turned the affair to tragedy. In his efforts to avoid the others Lovell rolled his aircraft into a dive heading east, but failed to recover fully from the dive before striking a tree besides "Honeylands", off Honey Lane. The collision with the tree robbed the Hurricane of flying speed. Not much further along Lovell hit the ground. It was 4pm. Contemporary reports state that the 19 year old died instantly; in any case he was reputedly dead when the first ground born onlooker got to his aircraft. Not a total wreck, but severely compressed by the tremendous 'g' force of the impact, there was no fire. The debris from the smashed Hurricane, including a whole variety of panels and ammunition belts, were quickly snatched up by bands of arriving civilian youth. This snatching gave Albert Ross and other members of the authorities a headache as they attempted to get to the machine whilst being constantly diverted to retrieve bits. It was fortunate that the pilot was already dead.

On other occasions Albert was tasked with combing the houses in Upshire for a

specific large cache of war booty in the hands of youths. In one particular instance it was reported that a number of large items had been thrown over the side of a crippled USAAF bomber struggling to maintain height whilst returning from Germany. None of the jettisoned equipment had been found by the military and it was down to the police stationed along the flight-path to seek it out. The reports proved to be far more awesome than first credited and the police were soon finding that the material included fully loaded and operational .50cal machine guns and ammunition.

At the end of the war Albert was awarded his first medal, the 1939-45 Defence Medal. This worthy item was joined a few years after the war by the Police Long Service and Good Conduct Medal instituted by King George VI in June 1951 and first issued in January 1952. Coincidentally, Albert entered his 22<sup>nd</sup> year of service, the minimum qualifying period.

After the war years Albert spent an increasing amount of his duty time as assistant to the sergeant warrant officer, including Sergeant Stanley Delo, to the Waltham Abbey Petty Sessions, late Magistrates Court.

The old purpose built court house that had stood in Highbridge Street for almost 100 years had been destroyed in the explosion of a V2 rocket in March 1945 so that the court had been forced to seek alternative accommodation in the Council Chamber of the Waltham Abbey Town Hall. To ensure that the court could sit at this venue a fair amount of furniture removal was required every week.



On July 6, 1959 Albert retired from the Metropolitan Police with a, then fairly untypical, length of service of thirty years. To mark the retirement his Waltham Abbey colleagues, and some of those from Walthamstow, Chingford and elsewhere, presented him with a fine barometer which took pride of place on the wall of his Rounton Road home. The local newspaper carried a quote that he had only been late for duty once in his service.

Apparently in good health, a mere seven months later, on Wednesday February 4, 1960 he suffered a fatal heart attack at home and died. He was survived by his wife and married daughter. He was cremated at Enfield the following Monday. The barometer marking his police service still hung on the wall in the Rounton Road terrace thirty years later.