

## Constable John Chilcott

Warrant number 139036

Born in February 1929 in the West Country to a large family he was always reputed to have been born in a castle. It is believed that the reason behind this tale is that his father was the Gamekeeper to the castle.

After the war he joined the army

He joined the Metropolitan Police in 1953 and was initially posted to Chelsea central London. There he met Ruth his wife of nearly 50 years, they married and had six children

Eventually in the early 1960s he was posted to serve in Waltham Abbey as PC610J. He moved into the house he was living in at the time of his death – 2 Monkswood Avenue, Waltham Abbey opposite the then Methodist Church – he reverted quite quickly into the role of country gent. and bought a horse. Unfortunately it seems he had the horse but had neglected to find somewhere to keep it. As a result he took it home, literally. Shortly he found a suitable field and retained an interest in one a short distance up Galley Hill from Broomstickhall Road. The topography has changed in recent years so that it is now on the corner of Parklands.

In that field all manner of country pursuits took place including riding classes and gymkhanas. For very many years he was the supplier of eggs to the police service and at least part of the civil population of the town. Anyone wishing to purchase a chicken could also be accommodated. There was no need for a shop as such. The front counter served the purpose sufficiently and Waltham Abbey was very much a station that promoted such 'un-police' like activities.

In his service John, a very craggy and rugged looking character, was involved in quite a number of escapades. The arrival of the Unit Policing System to Waltham Abbey in the early 1960s expanded the number of officers serving the community and increased the number of stories about the men and women stationed there.

The 'Noddy' bike – the Velocette LE200 – was at the centre of most storylines, there was something about the machine that brought problems of sorts to all who rode them. Perhaps it was that the riders were closer to the environment than they would be when they retreated into the dryness afforded by the later patrol cars.

Police no longer trudge through Epping Forest on patrol but in the days when it was quite normal – when the large police boots were for walking through mud and water and perhaps pushing a bicycle along pathways and across the land their propensity for keeping out water was regularly tested. When the motor bikes came along it seemed a natural projection to take them cross country also. It was also a fun activity - with pay.



John Chilcott in 1977

Unfortunately the combination of mud and a powered rear wheel was not necessarily one which would ensure 'tidy' police. It may have been normal to enjoy the rides through the forest lands but the older hands knew that there were places where the bikes and the riders could be literally hosed down before return to the station and off duty. That was of course in the days when outer rainwear worn by police was also waterproof. Nonetheless there were many instances of riders coming to grief in the mud and slime of the wet forest lands and some have been passed down naming John as among those that became literally stuck in the mud from time to time.

Away from the mud the most famous story relating to John concerns an area in the Lee Valley off Waltham Road where the modern Metropolitan Police Fishery is located. Back before the area was remodelled a bungalow once stood on a small island alongside a wartime Bailey bridge.

The occupier was well known to the officers at Waltham Abbey, at least by repute, due to her naturist habits. Even in the 1960s, Doris Haines' naturism remained a quirky trait. The island she lived alone on could only be approached by way of a narrow footpath along an equally small causeway. The causeway was often flooded over; remaining so until the later digging of a relief channel which demolished both it and the bungalow.

Doris often sat out periods of being cut off by floodwaters without the least drama. Unfortunately, not everyone accepted this. On Tuesday November 19th 1963, a call claiming that Doris was in mortal danger and cut off was sent to the police station by a passer-by.

Immediately two officers, John Hamer and John Chilcott, were sent on their "Noddy" bikes to Fishers Green, intent on helping the maiden in distress.

By the time they arrived, the flood was at its peak. The swirling waters had, long engulfed the line of four-foot-high wooden posts marking the line of the path along the causeway. The two policemen hailed Doris' cottage. Once contacted, the lady sensibly declared that she would remain in the safety of her home to see how the flooding progressed. John instantly realising that his chance of fame was slipping away with such a defeatist attitude, persuaded his chosen "damsel in distress" that rescue was indeed the only course to be taken! In the face of misgivings by his fellow officer (and of course, the subject of the rescue herself) Constable Chilcott set forth on his mercy mission through the cold and swirling waters.

Both rescuer and potential rescued set off to meet in the muddy waters of the causeway. Chilcott, confident of his route in spite of a lack of familiarity, made his way along the line of the path and moved towards the bungalow. The speed of progress was startling, allowing the officer's confidence to grow at a similar rate. Disaster arrived at the three-quarters mark. Having made good progress through the chill waters, and moving ahead to the next marker post, the officer suddenly disappeared from view in the water. Any worry as to his ultimate safety soon evaporated as he re-surfaced within a second, spluttering wildly, from the depths in almost the same position, re-found his footing, and found himself being dragged from the water by Doris.

It was Doris that ultimately ended up confidently leading her potential rescuer quickly and safely to the riverbank that she had initially shunned. Once dried out, Doris was able to return to her home after the flood had gone. The potential white knight on a "Noddy" bike suffered greater hardships from the ribbing of his colleagues in later years than he did when the events were reported at the time in the local newspapers. Treated in the gallant manner it was meant, not a word of the mishap that had befallen the rescuer passed Doris Haines' lips.

The next major incident was one where he saved the life of a woman; unfortunately it was not actually quite so gallant an effort as it was later portrayed in the local press.

Police converged on a call for help from a top floor flat at Highbridge Court, Highbridge Street. One officer was making his way into the flat from the rear intent on stopping what was thought to be a man attacking a woman. Meanwhile the police Area Car crew arrived at the front door and attempted to enter by an urgent thumping on the front door. The disturbance inside ceased and they were let in by PC Ron Penney who had gone in through a window, halted the mayhem and arrested the perpetrator – a man intent on killing his wife.

The newly arrived crew was given the task of securing the scene and attempting First Aid to stave off the victim's slide towards being yet another murder victim. Ron escorted the attacker on foot the short distance to the police station.

The radio operator on the Area Car was John Chilcott. He was presented with an apparently impossible task of lifesaving. He was faced with an injured woman lying on the floor covered in blood and clearly dying in a very bloody manner at his feet. Although his first thought was towards life saving, he openly admitted later that he gave up all hope of saving her life, and resorted to cosmetic action.

It transpired later that all the commotion was the woman was bleeding profusely from a neck wound and gasping for air through a severed airway. To the untrained eye the woman plainly stood no chance at all of survival.

The simple placing of a handy tea towel over the gaping gap - more to hide the ghastly sight from view than anything medical - succeeded in both stemming the flow of blood and sealing the airway all quite by accident. Upon such simple actions are heroes made.

Thanks to the rescue mission and subsequent makeshift first aid by default, the victim survived. Indeed it was such a good job that the victim's estranged husband eventually only faced a charge of grievous bodily harm (GBH) in a, then rare, 'plea bargaining' arrangement.

Two of the three officers were commended for their actions, Ron for his daring window entry and John for the lifesaving. He received a scroll from the Royal Humane Society - an event which tended to go some way towards cancelling out the debacle at Fishers Green a few years earlier.



**HEROES**

John Chilcott and Ron Penney from the Waltham Telegraph report of the time.

Having spent many years acting as near enough permanent Station Officer in Sun Street John retired from the Metropolitan Police in 1985 and held his retirement party in the upper room of the New Inn in Sun Street. After retirement he focussed even more of his time on his already expansive agricultural activities.

Ruth died in 2003.

In later years he was living with Pam Horner at 2 Monkswood Avenue. She was a former wife of a Ministry of Defence policeman and had worked at Waltham Abbey Police Station as a cleaner. They had strong ties in a common interest in horses.

John died after a long struggle with various variations of cancer in early July 2012.

On Thursday 2 August 2012 at 1pm at a well attended service in The Abbey Church a funeral was held for John. After the service his body was interred in the New Cemetery Sewardstone Road, the first police officer to be laid there after Michael Chapman died in service twenty years earlier.