

## Sergeant Robert Hole

Robert Hole was born to Ann and Richard Hole, a farmer, at Withypool, Somerset on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1830 and Christened in the same village in January 1831. The family home was 'Knighton' an 80 acre farm situated a few miles away outside Dulverton, Devon.

At the age of 21 the six feet tall Robert Hole tired of labouring in the countryside and left Dulverton to join the Metropolitan Police. Two weeks before his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1852, he became a constable on the 'N' or Islington Division – the 30,694<sup>th</sup> man to join up.

On 19<sup>th</sup> May 1858 he had six years service and moved from 'N' Division to 'A' Division in the Pimlico area of central London with the rank of acting sergeant [two chevron stripes]. It was to be another eight years before he gained the next rank, a three stripe sergeant, on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1866. He remained on the 'A' Division temporarily.

Three months later, on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, he was again posted to 'N' Division. Although in his mid-30s he remained unmarried and was therefore accommodated in the single men's accommodation barracks adjoining the police station of the Royal Gun-Powder Factory in Powdermill Lane, Waltham Abbey. He was there at the time of the 1871 Census; his companions were a younger sergeant and ten constables.

The following year, by now aged 42, he married and left behind him a life in police barracks. His bride was the widow of the late licensee of the New Inn public house in Sun Street, Waltham Abbey. The bride was Louisa Coxshall [nee Coombes], a seamstress by trade.

The couple were married at Edmonton on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1872. They moved to live in the centre of Waltham Abbey and took up residence in Highbridge Street, close to the police station and parish church. Their stay at that home was brief. Louisa placed an advertisement in the local newspaper in 1873 informing her customers that she was moving to a new home at Chapel House, Paradise Row.

MRS. HOLE,  
(Late Mrs COXSHALL,  
Milliner and Dressmaker,  
BEGS to inform her Customers and the  
Inhabitants of Waltham Abbey that she has  
REMOVED from Highbridge-street to CHAPEL  
HOUSE, PARADISE ROW, where she hopes to con-  
tinue to receive the liberal favours she has hitherto  
enjoyed.

From January 1873, Robert Hole PS27N appeared with some regularity in the surviving 'Refused Charges Book' of the Waltham Abbey police stations. In 1874 he

was credited with being 'in charge' of the old police station at a time when building of the new one was in hand on a plot in Sun Street.

From 26<sup>th</sup> March 1875 the Hole's had a son, Ernest, whilst living in their Paradise Row home.

Robert was present at the time of the opening of the new police station in Sun Street in January 1876 and witnessed the closure of the decrepit old police station – the former Parish Watch and courthouse which had been in Metropolitan Police use since 1840. For that small building the next quarter century was to be a library and reading room.

The new building saw Robert lose his status of being in charge of the station; the post was taken by an inspector.

Later that year, in September 1876, Robert was promoted thanks to the introduction of a new rank to the force. The new rank was that of Station Sergeant, denoted until 1921 by the wearing of four chevron stripes; it was this that was to give Robert and three other sergeants [Charles Tubb, James Ware and George Rolfe] at Waltham Abbey a rise in status without the awkwardness of moving stations. That multiple promotion and the introduction of a new headgear for the police – the evolution of what became the classic helmet – took up many column inches in the local press that autumn.

Nearly two years later, on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1878, Robert was promoted to Inspector a move that led to an almost complete change in his issue uniform but brought about little change in his duties, he will have still been faced with a 12 hour day and near 7 day week. In spite of the change of circumstances he remained local to Waltham Abbey but with a wider remit in other parts of the Woodford Sub-Division. Confirming his presence, his name continued to appear in the 'Refused Charge Book' until November 1880. He will have had access to a horse or cart enabling him to effectively patrol across Epping Forest.

He resigned from the force aged 51 years on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1881, he had almost 29 years service performed under difficult conditions of service. He like many of his contemporaries was not allowed to complete 30 years service. Although the pension regulations had recently been improved his annual pension of £78 may only have been payable for five years rather than for life. He does not appear to have been suffering from ill health, indeed he immediately set up a haulage business at Brookland Villa in Enfield Highway and lived for another dozen years before dying on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1894 at the age of 63 years. Louisa survived him until 1921.