

Chief Inspector Charles Goble

Charles Goble was unusual among 19th Century police officers in that he was to serve in excess of 30 years.

Born in East Malling, near Maidstone, Kent on 13th April 1839 to Charlotte and Benjamin a paper maker Charles went on to seek initial employment as a servant before joining the Metropolitan Police as a constable on 2nd November 1857. His age of just 18½ years shows us that a similar 'new' scheme introduced in the 1980s had a precedent. The normal mid-20th Century joining age was 19 years. The difference between the 19th and 20th Century schemes was that the earlier edition allowed the new recruit on to the street at that age where the 20th Century version 'hid' them in a training school for six months.

Initially posted to 'R' Division, by 1861 he was serving as PC46 within Devonport Dockyard Division, not exactly life in the big city but at that time the Metropolitan Police were responsible for sending officers to a number of far flung docks including those in Kent, Devon and Scotland. He resigned from the Metropolitan Police on 14th November that year and applied for the City of London Police force. In those days the City Police accepted men of 5 feet 8 inches or over [in the mid 20th Century it was 6 feet or over] but it would seem that his four years and twelve days prior police service held sway for they took him on with a height that was undoubtedly 'challenged' it was shown as 5' 7¼" when he retired many years later.

On entry into the City Police he was 22 years old and still single. He was posted to the then City Police HQ - Moor Lane Police Station situated just north of London Wall. The building [below] was destroyed in the 1940 bombing.



At the time of joining the City Police he again showed himself as a 'servant' residing at 8 Devonshire Place, Kender Street, Greenwich. Perhaps not finding life in Devon suited him he had decided to return to a life in service until that too quickly soured.

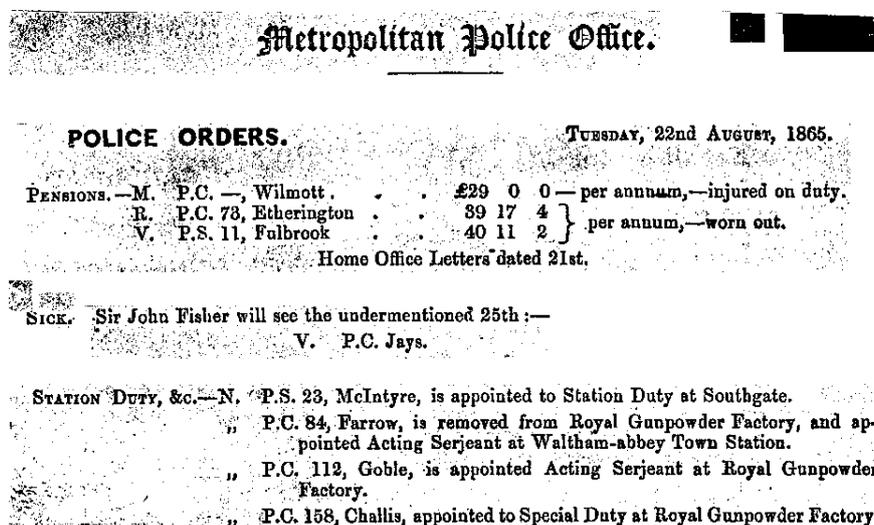
Clearly he was finding it difficult to settle and after just six months he again resigned from the police service on 26th June 1862. The City Police noted he was leaving for a 'superior position' but there is no indication what that was.

Two months later he had rejoined the Metropolitan Police. On 18th August 1862 Charles Goble was listed as joining with a warrant number of 42412. Further confusion in the story appears when on 15th December 1862 Charles Goble re-appears as a joiner with yet another new warrant number of 43315 and a divisional [collar] number of 112N. Quite what happened is unclear, perhaps it was a paper error and he did not physically rejoin on the August date at all.

On this third occasion he stayed with the police, by now perhaps having arrived at the conclusion that work as a servant was not all he believed it to be. Someone within the police establishment must have liked what they saw for all this confusion to be set aside to let him back into the police for the third, or potentially the fourth, time.

We do not know what stations he was posted to initially within 'N' Division, the references to him merely noted advances in his rates of pay as he passed through various 'classes' on 2nd April 1864, 4th March 1865 and the 14th October 1865.

The last of the constable class payments came some two months after he had been promoted to the rank of acting sergeant [two chevrons]. In Police Orders dated 22nd August 1865 A/PS 112N Goble was posted on promotion to serve at the Royal Gun Powder Factory [RGPF] at Waltham Abbey. Two years later he was promoted to full sergeant. After the announcement of the promotion on 29th April 1867 he was undoubtedly moved away from the RGPF and we lose sight of his career for some years.



An Inspector Goble, a fairly unusual name, was shown in charge of the 'N' or Islington Division Reserve in 1870 but the exact location is not clear. By 1871 he was married to Eliza, a Stepney girl some nine years his junior (it is probable that they married late in 1868 in Camberwell). The couple's first child, Eleanor Maria was born in Hackney in 1872; the next two children, Edith and Minnie were also born in Hackney in 1874 and 1877 respectively.

In July 1879, Inspector Charles Goble and his family moved to Waltham Abbey to take up residence at 8 Powdermill Lane. He took charge of the RGPF and RSAF, places familiar to him from his days there a decade earlier, from the retiring Chief Inspector Lewis Clements.

Clements had been in charge of the arms factories in the rank of inspector upon arriving but, following distinguished service at the scene of one of the numerous accidental explosions on site, he had been promoted 'in situ' to the rank of chief inspector for the rest of his service there. With this exceptional precedent it was felt that his replacement should also hold the enhanced rank. This pressure probably came from the civil side of the factory rather than the police themselves. As the higher costs were partly met by the RGPF via the War Office the pressure was difficult for the police to deny. Shortly after his arrival the pressure from the factory bore fruit and Charles was promoted to Chief Inspector but it is clear that the police were unwilling partners.

Having a chief inspector in charge at the RGPF distorted the accepted rank structure for the Waltham Abbey police stations. This placed the leader of the 'Mills police at a higher rank than the man in charge of the town police station in Sun Street, and yet the town station was the only one of the two with the responsibility of dealing with all the local prisoners and charging them.

The town station inspector, Charles Tubb, faced the potential problem of being outranked when dealing with RGPF matters.

the coals and demanded on bail until
Tuesday 13th inst when he was fined
5/- or 4 days imprisonment. He
paid the fine.

C. Goble
Ch. Insp.

See Court entry No 113 and 27/4/1889

We have no images of the man but this document was signed by him in 1889.

At the time of the taking of the National Census in 1881 Charles Goble and his family were living at 8 Powdermill Lane with Benjamin his 80 year old widower father.

Most, if not all, of the reports passing through the RGPF police station in Powdermill Lane in this period bear his name or comment; most are of such a mundane nature that they do not bear repeating. The main purpose of the police being the security of the perimeter and stopping workers entering with any form of smoking material or match – the surviving files reflect this important but otherwise dull process. The dullness of the process tended to foster petty process with many otherwise minor incidents being pursued to the fullest extent.

One incident followed the receipt of an unsigned letter originating from the East End of London. It complained of gun powder transportation barges being left unattended near Monier Road and the crew taking to a nearby dwelling – a place described as being ‘a place worse than a brothel.’ Although this was an obvious case of venomous neighbours creating trouble the matter was fully investigated and reported upon at length by Charles. The findings were that the allegation was baseless but in fairness if there had been a thread of truth the dangers surrounding an unmanned powder barge were very real.

On 11th April 1892 Chief Inspector Charles Goble retired from the RGPF and the Metropolitan Police with an annual pension of £143.17s.4d. As had been the case with his original remuneration part of the pension had been paid by the War Office. He had been in post more than a dozen years and had been in the Metropolitan Police continuously for nearly 30 years since December 1862. Taking in his earlier service he could add another four years of somewhat erratic policing.

When he retired the 53 years old was still living in Powdermill Lane but we have no more traces of him.



Many years later – the police houses in Powdermill Lane