

Sergeant Alfred Charles Church

Alfred Church served as a police sergeant at Waltham Abbey – mainly in the Powder Mills, between 1899 and 1920.

On the 29th October 1866, at New Ham, near Chertsey, Surrey, Alfred Charles was born to Elizabeth and Henry Church, a labourer. Police records show the birth-place as Addlestone, Surrey, and a slight variance with his birth certificate.

Prior to joining the police service, he worked as a gardener, one of his father's employments, and in the General Post Office at Addlestone. He joined the police on 31st December 1888, with the warrant number of 74114, and was posted to the Woolwich Dockyard as P.C.53. In those days the dockyard was policed by the Metropolitan Police. The divisional letter was absent from his collar numeral, the officer's assigned number appearing with a crown emblem signifying the division.

On 22nd March 1891, at Chigwell Church, he married Alice Lavinia Hyde from Chigwell. They were both 24 years old at the time. Shortly after this, on 17th July the same year, Alfred was transferred to the 'T' division, still as a P.C., taking up the number 274T. He was then earning 26 shillings per week.

Whilst serving in the 'T' division he gained the first medal, of three, at the time of the Queen Victoria Jubilee, in 1897.

He gained promotion to sergeant early in 1899, and on the 6th May was transferred from the 'T' division in Surrey, nearer to his wife's home area, on 'N' division. Initially allotted the number 83N, he appears not to have ever worn it, taking up 33N instead. This was not an unusual occurrence. He was then earning 34 shillings a week. Posted to the Royal Gun-Powder Factory in Waltham Abbey, he took up residence with his family in one of the terrace houses at 9 Lea Road, quite close to the factory. At this period, during the South African War, the RGPF was being expanded into a second site situated to the south of the main town upon Quinton Hill Farm lands, in addition to the much older north site.

The small terraced dwelling taken over by the family housed nine of the Church clan, seven children, Samuel, Charles, Edith, Grace, Hilda, Edward and Dora and the two parents. Edward and Dora died in youth and Charles during the Great War.

Alfred's duties in the factory were mainly confined to the interior security of the factory, with few incidents outside its walls calling upon his skills as a policeman. They were, in effect, little more than an internal security force. Alfred went on to complete an unusually lengthy 32 years in the service. He retired at the age of 54 years, on the 26th December 1920. His 'Certificate of Service' issued to all retiring men, showed his conduct as "exemplary".

He was on pension for a little over 7 years. On the 28th February 1928 at his home, 9 Lea Road, he died at the age of 62 years, from Carcinoma of the liver. The certificate was signed by his sole surviving son, Samuel, then living at Malvern Villa in Monkswood Avenue, Waltham Abbey. Alfred was laid to rest in the Sewardstone Road cemetery on the 2nd March.

Fifty eight years later, upon the death of the last of the residents of Malvern Villa, a photograph of the Waltham Abbey police sergeants was 'rescued' from the effects and a copy obtained for the police station after it had taken up residence in Surrey. Taken in the period 1903-7, it is the sole picture known to include Alfred Church in 'uniform.



The sergeants of two police stations in Waltham Abbey drawn together. Sergeant Charles Church is seated in the front row between the two four-stripe station sergeants.