

William Arthur BROOKER

William Brooker was born in Barnet during 1859. At the age of 24, on April 2, 1883, he joined the Metropolitan Police and took up warrant number 67660. He was initially posted to serve as a constable on 'Y' Division, in north London.

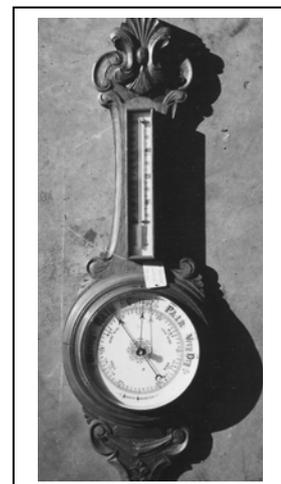
During his time there in 1887 he was issued with one of the 13,881 Queen Victoria Jubilee medals, a memento issued to each of the police serving in the Metropolitan Police at that time. When, ten years later, the Queen directed the issue of a further commemorative medal to all ranks, Brooker was one of 8,708 officers who received a bar to attach to the blue ribbon on the earlier medal. Over 7,400 new medals were issued to officers joining in the subsequent period. In 1902 the officer, by now Sergeant Brooker, received one of the almost 17,000 King Edward VII Coronation Medals issued to all Metropolitan Police ranks.

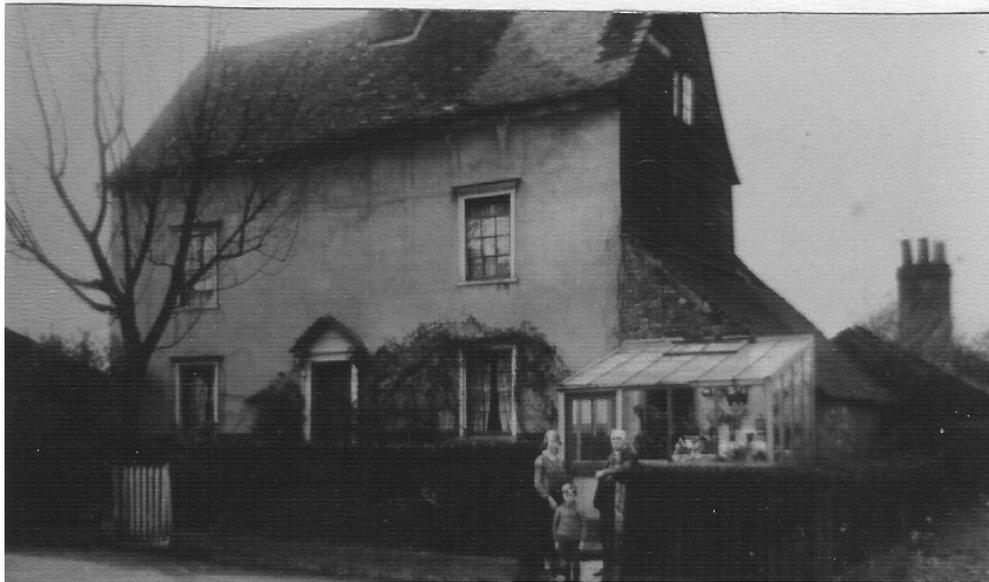
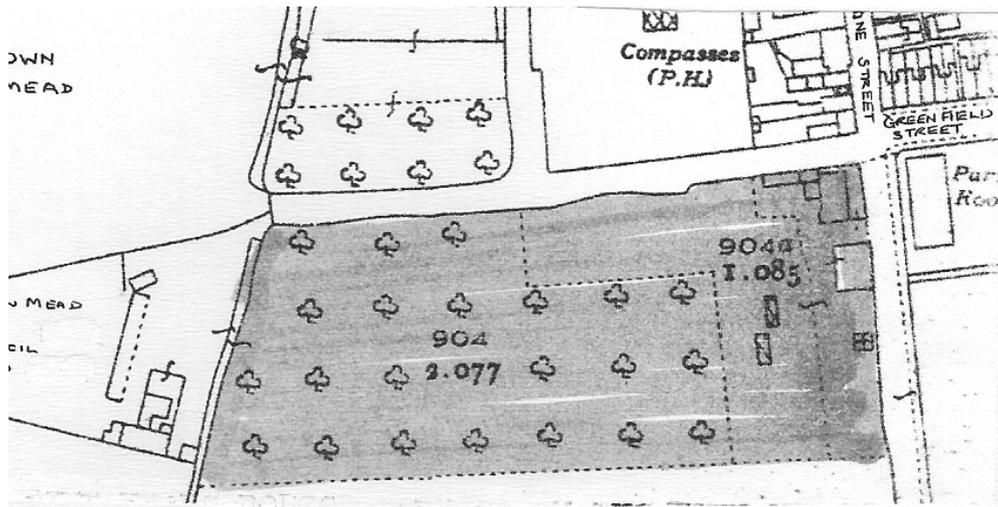
In 1903 William Brooker attained his final police rank, and as the four stripe Station Sergeant 61N he transferred to live and work in Waltham Abbey, then coded "WY", as the officer in charge of the sectional station on the Enfield Highway, "EY", sub-division.



After the passage of some nine decades, the prime area of interest in William Brooker was his residence, is shrouded in mystery. He moved into an old house near the town centre known as "The Gardens" in Sewardstone Street, then a mere rutted track to the south of the town and at the junction with two other tracks then named Carters Field Road and Sewage Works Lane by the locals. This house opposite the local Parish Room was blessed with extensive orchards and, as Brooker himself was subject to a number of police disciplinary stringencies, his wife was initially tasked with their upkeep. Set full against the financial attainments of most police at that time Sergeant Brooker was able to buy this property, the date is uncertain, but it was certainly prior to 1913. It may have been that one of the family came into a legacy.

William Brooker was only to serve a short while in charge of the Waltham Abbey police, when he reached pensionable service of 25 years in May 1908 he had only served at Sun Street for five years, a short period in which he quickly became involved in the local culture. Retiring SPS Brooker was presented with a barometer by the men of the Enfield Highway sub-division. A short item appearing in the local newspaper, "The Waltham Weekly Telegraph", in reporting the retirement claimed, in suitably couched terms, that he was held "in the highest esteem" by police and townsfolk alike.





In truth it seems more likely that the fondly remembered William Brooker launched himself on a new career of one of the best remembered policemen of Waltham Abbey after the date of his retirement, and this partly because of his inability to finally cut the ties with the police. After retiring, and as his hair whitened, William flung himself into town life as a civilian with a new will. As well as taking up a political stance by joining the local authority, the Waltham Holy Cross Urban District Council, as a councillor, he was to be seen deeply involved in the creation of a local branch of the Voluntary Ambulance Division (VAD) of the British Red Cross.



William Brooker and an ambulance behind "The Gardens" [above] c1920

The transfer of primary ambulance services from the police use of the Bischoffen hand ambulance to local volunteer manned motor and horse ambulances was a

development that came about immediately prior to the Great War and William Brooker was there at the front of the organisation.

Along with many other recently retired men of his day, William Brooker was recalled to undertake further duty with the police, at his substantive retirement rank of SPS, at least three times after his retirement. The first occasion was during the 1911 Coronation he was then recalled just for the event, the second during the Dock Strikes in the summer months of 1912, when he was issued with a new temporary warrant number of 04372. On this occasion, with hundreds of others, he was re-engaged on May 28 and served for some three 28 day periods, and the third was as the result of war breaking out in 1914. As a result of the latter occasion his period of extra police service stretched into years.

We know little of his duties on each of the early occasions, nor do we know of his divisional identity number. Although assigned to the (then) non-existent "Z" and "O" divisions, his duties remained with N Division, presumably in and around Waltham Abbey perhaps employed 'looking after the shop' while younger officers undertook the coronation and strike duties, but just as likely undertaken in the east end. For the war years, as SPS 148N, he again served at the local police station in his old role, but this time as a subordinate to his own 1908 replacement SPS Henry Skeates. He continued involvement in the VAD using many of the war duty special constables to assist in the transport of army wounded the 1½ miles from the Great Eastern Railway at Waltham Cross & Abbey railway station along Eleanor Cross Road, Station Road and Highbridge Street to the temporary hospital situated in the local town hall.

When peace returned in 1918 he resumed his former state of retirement, having now completed just short of thirty years in the service. It was now back to the pursuits of politics and the much loved VAD.

His daughter ran a thriving fruit business from a conservatory style shop attached to the side of "The Gardens" house. To the rear William Brooker's orchards of juicy apples supplied much of the produce and was also a great draw for members of the youth of the day on "scrumping" forays. It has been said that these attempts at obtaining free apples were made all the more worthwhile with the added danger of discovery by the proprietor. Possessed of a vicious temper (and not to speak of the fact that, as an ex-policeman, he was liable to receive police visitors at any time) any errant youngsters were liable to receive a sharp and painful smack if caught.

Among the police visitors entertained by William Brooker was PC John Brooker, an officer who lived nearby in Victoria Road. This officer, although a contemporary, was somewhat younger than William and served into the 1920s. Despite sharing the same surname, he was not identified as being related to William, but was a regular caller as he kept pigs at the rear of "The Gardens". A love of cricket was another means by which William maintained contacts with the police service. He was to be regularly seen umpiring matches for the police. In the 1920s home matches were invariably held at Beech Hill Park, Pynest Green, on the edge of the forest, this being the land of another police and local council stalwart A J Edwards JP. Edwards had served at Sun Street in the Great War as assistant commander of the special

constabulary, it was he who had equipped the games room at the police station at the end of the war.

Sections of land surrounding "The Gardens" were sold off as building plots in the years following the war, the final piece of land passing from Brooker's ownership in the mid-1930s. The once extensive orchards gave way to streets and houses, one of which, Orchard Gardens, the former Town Mead Road, a name re-sited nearby, reflects that. Audley Gardens was the centre of the former orchard and both names reflect the name of the former house, a building demolished to site a shop latterly called "The Corner Shop" but now again rebuilt into housing.

It is another road that sprang up in the wake of these land sales that is the more important aspect of this, his life story. Brooker Road was named after William Brooker upon being built up with housing. On the site of Carters Field Road and the former Sewage Works Lane, a local term that never reached any known official map of the area, it originally extended just the length of the housing, a couple of hundred yards to the south of Sewardstone Street. In later years the area around the former sewage works became an industrial estate and resulted both in the creation of another, re-sited, Cartersfield Road and a greatly extended Brooker Road. The naming of Brooker Road after William is undoubtedly a reflection of his post retirement activities in the Red Cross and, most tellingly, the council chamber rather than his periods with the police force but why let accuracy get in the way of a good tale!

Brooker and his family moved to a new home at 31 Monkswood Avenue, Waltham Abbey where, at the age of 89, and after a long illness, he died on November 18, 1948. He had been on the police pension for thirty years, forty years if the war break is ignored. He had outlived his wife and three of his five children. He had not broken all faith with his roots though, he was buried at Finchley, close to his Barnet birth place.

BROOKER ROAD