

Constable Frederick Phillips

Fred was born in Wellington, Somerset on the 13 of July 1925, the son of Frederick Charles and Alice Amelia who lived at 23 New Riverside, Springfield, Wellington. Fred's father was a General Post Office telephones wireman, and this occupation meant that the family were constantly on the move. It was not that the elder Frederick's area of operations changed a great deal, they didn't. G.P.O. rules of the period dictated that all of their employees should keep moving, so as not to form any close ties with any neighbours. Thus the family lived in two or three different houses in Wellington, then moved to Nashfield, and on to Tiverton, where again a number of houses were occupied.

School leaving age in those days was 14 years, and Fred took up employment in the building trade for a couple of years at the start of the second world war. The misplaced glamour of fighting in the war took hold of him in 1942, when he was 16 years old. Concealing his real age, he signed on as an 18 year old with the Royal Navy. He spent about 12 weeks in initial training and specialist training as a gun-layer before he was discovered to be under age, early the following year.

Having been found out, the Navy discharged him with a promise that they would recall him when he was old enough. Unfortunately by the time he was old enough, (July the same year) they appear to have forgotten him, and he spent the rest of the war in building works on various West Country military bases. On the 13 November 1943 he married Sylvia Butland in Tiverton. He was still 18 but showed himself as 19.

He was working as a painter when his only daughter Linda was born after the war. In 1950 he joined the Merchant Marine in place of serving with the military. He joined his first ship only three days after finishing training, on the 6 June 1950. His training, and signed contract placed him as a fireman or greaser on the Plymouth Shipping Pool, working in the engine room. Although listed as Plymouth, he rarely picked up a ship from that port, most were from Avonmouth. He served on a variety of ships criss-crossing the world before falling ill for a period at the end of his two year contract with the Shipping Federation. Having made the break he applied for the Metropolitan Police in 1955, and on the 2 August became P.C. 141597.

His passage through the Peel House training school in Regency Street, SW1, was interrupted by an injury received playing basket ball. This robbed him of his position as 'Class Captain' in his first class, as he was put back into the one following behind and stayed in the training school an extra month, after a spell in the Denmark Hill police nursing home.

It was Christmas 1955 before he walked the streets. He found himself at Tottenham Police Station, P.C.350Y. Home was in the section house over the police station in the High Road, merely a partitioned area of a large room, and similar to the very basic conditions found at Peel House. The family, Sylvia, and 9 year old Linda remained at Market Terrace in Tiverton.



He was soon in the thick of police work and earning himself complaints from members of the public; an aspect of life with which he was to be very familiar. It must have been early 1956, at about 7pm one evening in 'West Green Road. He had just left the company of a sweet shop and its lady owner and emerged with bar of chocolate in hand, to see a very respectable looking gent wearing a bowler hat passing by. The respectable gent stopped and turned to the yet wet behind the ears officer of the local constabulary. "Officer, I would like a word with you" said the quite impressive figure. "Yes sir?" said the unsuspecting Fred.

A steely dark object appeared in the mans hand from a pocket, followed by the instruction "Put your hands up' Here he was, not 'five minutes' in the job, being accosted by a man with an object that looked all too much like a dangerous revolver. Fred of course was also armed. His truncheon lay in its specially made pocket of the great coat he wore, beneath the all enveloping cape that shielded him from the rain.

Notwithstanding the obvious dangers, Fred laid into the gunman, one time respectable gent, who so threatened him. But he just could not get his own lump of wood free from its snug housing in the coat to assist his efforts. Fortunately he

succeeded in overcoming his attacker without having to suffer the blast of the revolver into his body. Surely his actions were grounds for a commendation.

The now floored 'city gent' muttered his credentials to Fred and the world about "I am the Sherriff of West Green Road". From that point on all chance of any official recognition of a brave or foolhardy act went out of the window. The man was MAD. The gun was an imitation firearm (though who was to know) and the character well known at the station, being subject to many reports, mainly treated with distain at the station. He even had a Sherriff's star to show. To add to all this, he complained at being attacked! It went nowhere of course, but it was number one of many to come.

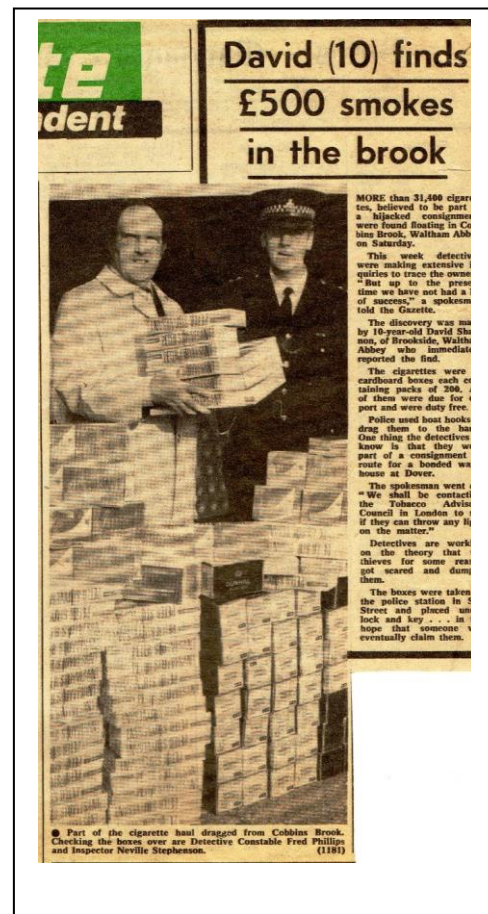
In May 1956 Sylvia and Linda joined him from Devon. They moved into Norton Close, Chingford, police quarters, and after only six months as PC. 350Y, Fred transferred to Chingford as P.C.644J, a number he was to retain for the rest of his service. Although his number never changed, he was to find himself stationed at a number of 'J' Division police stations.

After about 18 months at Chingford he joined the C.I.D. and moved to Walthamstow in late 1957. About thirty months later (c1960) he went to the Leyton station on 'Rowdyism' patrols for a few months, before returning to Chingford until 1966. For the next 11 years he was nominally stationed at Waltham Abbey, but often found helping out with various squads elsewhere. He spent a period with Bert Wickstead, the well known detective, on such duties as guarding a family from retribution from gangland associates. This saw him following various members of the family all over London.

Mainly as an area of pleasure he undertook Do-it-yourself and plumbing, the latter calling on his Merchant Marine skills. A house he bought in Templeton Avenue, Chingford was the first to be refurbished and extended, that was followed by another house in Saxon Way, Waltham Abbey and then family projects. A number of senior officers made use of his plumbing skills for their own houses. Wherever he went he could be found plying his skills.

Another memorable incident, part of the folk-lore that surrounded him, was when he arrested the full contents of a bus. The passengers, or many of them, had been causing trouble so he simply had the driver deliver the whole lot to Chingford police station where they could be dealt with. Having a single officer dealing with around 40 prisoners was somewhat easier then.

In about 1978 he returned to Chingford yet again, taking over the job of keeper of the Prisoners Property Store in the bowels of the newly rebuilt station.



As the date of his police service retirement drew closer, Fred investigated a number of offers of future employment. Having joined relatively 'late' in life, he was unable to easily remain to complete a full thirty years in the force. The 55 years age limit could only be reversed by way of special request, and then on an annual repeat basis. He was offered his stores job in the civilian role. This was tempting, but although it meant taking on a known role, other factors of personality came into play. Also on offer were two jobs at Heathrow Airport. Finally, having decided to leave the police service completely, he retired to take up as the Security Manager for the well known sportswear company in Edmonton: Fred Perry Sports. It was a brand new post, which meant that he could mould it to work the way he preferred. He retired in 1980 but only stayed at Fred Perry until November 1985.

Until 1986, when he and Sylvia moved down to Devon and another house to be refurbished, Fred worked when it suited him. He was, in the main, a freelance security adviser with spells as an advisor with the Citizens Advice Bureau. He re-located to Holland-on-Sea, Essex he was soon helping, out in the local C.A.B. when not refurbishing yet another property.

On the 9 November 1990 they returned to live in a flat in Waltham Abbey, then a house in Rue de St. Lawrence in the centre of town. By November 1996 they returned to the West Country to live.

He died at home on 3 November 2006, aged 81 years. The funeral was at the Exeter & Devon Crematorium two weeks later.