



WPC 1 OLIVE KEMP

The first WPC of the Buckinghamshire Constabulary

by

Lisa Edwards

Olive Kemp started in the Buckinghamshire Constabulary in 1945, aged twenty-two. Originally stationed in Slough, and later in Newport Pagnell, she was the first regular female police constable in Buckinghamshire, and as such, her collar number was WPC1.

There had been a Women's Auxiliary Police Corps (WAPC), and women had served in the Police War Reserve in Buckinghamshire during the Second World War, but by 1945, new recruits were needed. A great number of men had enlisted in the armed forces and were still overseas, whilst others had been killed in action. The Police War Reserve (personnel who had signed to serve for the duration only) was being released and men were retiring, leaving the constabulary understaffed. Alfred Hailstone writes that the then Chief Constable of Buckinghamshire, Thomas Warren*, was being called upon by the Management Association of the Slough Trading Estate to provide extra officers to combat the rise in theft and factory breaking. He was unable to do this and suggested they employ their own security.[1]

Olive Kemp became one of the Constabulary's badly needed new recruits and joined Slough police station in 1945. She is reported as being 5'3" in height, and was said to have been the smallest serving police officer in the Buckinghamshire Constabulary.

In September 1976, she retired after thirty years in the force, during which time she received several commendations, including the Alfred Rothschild Challenge Cup for 1955. The cup was given for 'performing the most gallant and outstanding act of the county force in 1955'.[2] John Cheney**, Chief Constable at the time, stated that Olive Kemp was the first woman to receive such an award in the history of the British Police.[3]

There are two documents in the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies in Aylesbury, detailing the award. The first is the **Buckinghamshire Constabulary Force Bulletin** (Centre catalogue reference BC/6/1). Edition 1/56, Friday 6 January 1956, under the heading of General Orders, explains how Olive came to win the Cup. On Thursday 3 March 1955, she attended the Slough Community Centre in order to watch for thieves after a handbag was stolen. To remain unseen she hid in a cupboard. It was from here that she caught sight of the two youths suspected of the theft, and in trying to arrest them, a fight ensued. Olive was attacked, and received a punch in the stomach and other

cuts. She managed to contain one of the offenders until other officers arrived. Her actions led to both youths being convicted at Slough Juvenile Court after which they were sent to an approved school for three years.

COMMENDATION

19. The Rothschild Cup for 1955 is awarded to W.P.C. 1 Olive KEMP, (Slough).
20. On 3rd March, 1955, W.P.C. Kemp visited the Community Centre, Slough, to keep observation following a complaint of the theft of a handbag. She concealed herself in a cupboard, and later detected two youths who were responsible for the larceny of a handbag. After arresting the youths, she was assaulted, hit in the stomach, and received various lacerations. However she was able to hold on to one offender until help arrived.

Both offenders were convicted at Slough Juvenile Court.

The second report is the **Report Book of the Chief Constable of the Buckinghamshire Constabulary** (Reference BC/2/6). Dated Wednesday 29 June 1955, the account is not as detailed as that in BC/6/1, but it does state that Olive had been commended in General Orders for using her initiative, keen observation and her smart work that resulted in the arrest of two youths.

(3) COMMENDATIONS OF MEMBERS OF THE FORCE

The undermentioned has been commended in General Orders since the last meeting:-

W.P.C. 1 O. Kemp (Slough) for smart work, keen observation and initiative which resulted in the arrest of two youths for larceny of handbags.

Olive's exploits seem to have caught the imagination of the press, and local headlines in the Slough are included 'Cupboard girl is commended'[4]; and 'Hiding in the cupboard was -guess who?'[5] Her tiny stature, including the phrase 'half pint' is commented on in most of the newspapers.

This was not the first time that she had been congratulated within BC/2/6. On Thursday 11 February 1954, she was praised by the Chief Constable for her good work in dealing with a girl missing from home. The Windsor Borough Juvenile Court also praised her for the same case.

Olive went on to gain many more commendations and her exploits continued to be reported in the press. It could be suggested that she was a trail blazer for future generations of police women in the county. She would have witnessed a great deal of change in her thirty years service, including the formation of the Thames Valley Constabulary on Monday 1 April 1968, when the county forces of Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, together with the forces of Reading County Borough and Oxford City amalgamated.

The Police Authority's website [7], of the now renamed Thames Valley Police, states the following : 'Today, Thames Valley Police has 4534 police officers, and of those 1460 are women. There are 1773 women police staff, 229 female PCSOs, 154 Special Constables are women and there are 239 female volunteers.'

I wonder if the young and ground breaking Olive could have imagined such numbers when she joined the force as WPC1 in 1945.

Olive Kemp passed away on Thursday 2 October 2014.

Lisa Edwards is the Public Services Officer (Community Outreach and Projects), Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, County Hall, Aylesbury, HP20 1UU

References :

- [1] HAILSTONE, Alfred *One hundred Years of Law-Enforcement in Buckinghamshire* (Dimbleby and Sons Limited) p47
- [2] *Slough Observer* 1956
- [3] *ibid*
- [4] *Slough Observer* Friday 1 July 1955
- [5] *Slough Observer* Friday 25 March 1955
- [6] *ibid*
- [7] <http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/aboutus/aboutus-museum/aboutus-museum-women-in-policing.htm> (Accessed Friday 5 February 2016)

* (Sir) Thomas Richard Pennefather WARREN (Bart)



- [1] Chief Constable Buckinghamshire 1928-1953
Awarded KPFSM LG 5 June 1952 p3041
Educated Burney's School, Gosport; RMC Sandhurst
Career Army service 1905/1928 (Army Service Corps; AMIMechE; Capt; WW1-Gallipoli, MiD twice, CBE Military 1919; in Ireland as Resident Magistrate 1919-1920; Maj 1924; QMG Wessex Area; LtCol 1928) - Plymouth City Police 1927/1928 (in office of Chief Constable whilst 'learning the ropes') - [1] (Barrister; recalled to Army 1941-1945 Lt, Irish Guards) - Retirement (succeeded as 8th Baronet in 1958)
b. Saturday 12 Sep 1885, Tipperary(?)
m. Ada Hely, 1s2d
d. Friday 8 Dec 1961, Ireland

** John Norman CHENEY



- [1] Chief Constable East Riding of Yorkshire 1946-1953
- [2] Chief Constable Buckinghamshire 1953-1967
Awarded (i) QPM LG 8 June 1963 p4823
(ii) CVO LG 1 January 1968 p5
(iii) Order of Saint John
Educated Eton; RMC Sandhurst
Career Army service 1914/1935 (60th Rifles; WW1, MiD, wia; Adj, Queen Victoria Rifles 1930) - War Department Constabulary 1935/1940 (ACC 1935) - Army service 1940/1946 (Dep Provost Marshall, N. Ireland 1940; LtCol 1941; OBE 1943; 21st Army Group, BAOR 1945; Brigdr 1945; French CdeG; MiD) - [1] - [2] - Retirement (Hon Corps of Gentlemen at Arms)
b. Thursday 25 November 1897, Ipswich
m. 1929 Muriel Haig, 2s1d
d. 1970, Amersham, Buckinghamshire