



## THE RICHARDSONS.

By B T. WALKER

Frank Richardson, my Great Grandfather, was born in the village of Upton St Leonards, near Gloucester, in 1851. He was one of ten children and his father was a well-known local builder as well as being the Deputy Parish Overseer. Having just written Frank Richardson's biography it appears he was a man of strong character. I have many instances to show this but they are too numerous to be within the scope of this article. He married Mary Taylor in 1871 at Cheltenham, Gloucestershire when they were both aged twenty. They moved immediately to a cottage just north of Birmingham city centre where he became a

small businessman. For whatever reason they soon returned to the city of Gloucester where their first born child, my Grandfather, was born. Two years later they returned to Birmingham where Great Grandfather joined the City Police Force as a Constable Third Class. Promotion was rapid, in 1874 he was promoted to Constable Second Class and in 1875 Constable First Class. Then in 1878 he was promoted to Sergeant and in 1881 I know the family was living in Digbeth, Birmingham. About this time Frank Richardson was working with the well known Birmingham Detective Gerald Van Helden who became the mentor for Frank's sons when they joined the Birmingham Police Force in the 1890's. In 1882 he applied for the post of Chief Constable of Hereford and Fire Brigade Superintendent. He obtained the position although there were several other candidates who appeared to be more highly qualified so I presume the Watch Committee saw in him the man they wanted. He was to remain in Hereford until 1920. My Great Grandparents had six sons and four daughters. Within months of taking up his new post he was presenting the Hereford Watch Committee with suggestions to update Hereford's Police and in particular their Fire Brigade. Throughout his career he constantly kept an eye on updating their resources and getting better equipment. He appears to have got his way most of the time. He attended many fires in the City day and night. In fact each night his maid set out his uniform over a chair in such a manner that when the fire bell rang he could get dressed very quickly indeed. Thus his personal pony and trap and later taxi, was never kept waiting when it arrived at his front door to take him to the incident. When there were fires at night he never failed to attend Court proceedings the following day. He always seized an opportunity if it was there. For instance in 1907 there was a big fire at one of the county's prestigious buildings, Rotherwas House. Great Grandfather raced to the scene although it was outside the city boundary and was credited with organising with great skill water jets utilising the fire steam engine Nell Gwynne. On the back of much press praise for his actions he immediately pressured the Watch Committee to purchase a motorised Fire Engine. A Dennis Patent Turbine Fire Engine duly arrived in Hereford in 1908! He was also the local President of the St John's Ambulance Brigade, the local Cricket Club, the Police Football Club, and he had an allotment near the Hereford meadows. I do not think he slept at all. He was awarded the Kings Medal in 1917 after 'meritous and special service' keeping the streets of Hereford safe especially during World War 1. and some particular detective work which was never published. At this time he was the Senior Chief Constable of England and the longest serving at 35 years. In fact from 1903 until 1920 three Richardson's were Chief Constables all at the same time, a feat which is not likely to be repeated. In office Great Grandfather had a reputation of being firm but fair. When he retired he moved back to the village of his birth, Upton St Leonards and in 1926 he was able to purchase the cottage of his birth when it came on to the market after many years of being out of the family ownership. He rented the cottage out but he lived in a house across the valley until he died in 1938. Frank Richardson spent 47 years in the Police Force.

My Grandfather Frank Richardson, the first born son, seated on the left in the photograph, served in the Detective's Office in Birmingham and then joined the Gloucester Police Force in Cheltenham in 1891.

Within three months he was posted to the City on a special assignment. In 1899 he was promoted to Station Sergeant and Chief Clerk to the Deputy Chief Constable of Gloucestershire and again assigned to special and important cases of crime. In particular he became involved in standardising the early use of fingerprinting and later was involved in some very serious criminal cases. In 1903 he was the successful candidate for the position of Chief Constable of Salisbury City Police. He had many landmarks



in his career. In 1904 he had a Reverend Litten living in Salisbury who was known nationwide for refusing to pay certain taxes. Duly sentenced to a term of imprisonment in Winchester goal there were real threats of violence from the Reverend's local supporters. Grandfather defused the situation at a stroke by appearing at Litten's house to escort him to Winchester by train but doing so in a suit and not uniform. Litten was moved to write to the press admiring Grandfather's tact. In 1906 he was applauded when he organised the Police, Fire, and Medical departments into a joint rescue service after an horrific train crash in the city. Also the use of horses in protecting the Royal Family when they visited the area by bringing in extra policemen from surrounding areas was a first and a special report was circulated to other Chief Constables in England, and conducting a murder enquiry of a ten year old boy named Teddy Haskell with Inspector Walter Dew of Crippen fame. He was not impressed with Dew. Grandfather was one of the first to officially employ a woman as a Constable in 1918 as opposed to the Matron system used previously. He had a reputation for always being visible on the city streets and at important events and indeed is captured on an early Pathé newsreel of 1918 walking across a park to talk to the city Mayor. At his retirement in 1929 the city official praised him for his fairness and tact in court cases. He died in 1952. Frank Richardson spent 38 years in the Police Force. Alfred Richardson, also seated, joined the Police Force as a Constable in 1890 at Birmingham prior to which he served like his brother in the Detective's Office under Superintendent Gerald Van Helden. He was promoted to Sergeant in 1898 and Inspector in 1900. He soon became a Detective Inspector and worked closely with Detective Superintendent Van Helden, a man who had worked with his father in the 1870's. In 1901 he applied for the Chief Constable post of Newcastle under Lyme and was successful but within 18 months had moved to be Chief Constable of Halifax, Yorkshire. He openly opposed women being in the Police Service and in fact none was employed during his term of office. I wonder how many times that topic came up in family conversations with his brother in Salisbury. He invented the Telephone Pillar System, the use of Identity Parades which are now standard, traffic signals as lights rather than semaphore and attached them to tram poles in Halifax, the Keep Left Rule for traffic after some bad accidents in the First World War blackouts and produced a booklet on how to police a crowd. He also was involved in perfecting the use of fingerprints setting up standards and procedures giving lectures in Yorkshire on the subject. During World War 1 he was a Major in nearby Catterick Camp during which he organised a body of 400 men as 'Specials'. He gained recognition for being an exceptionally good organiser for routes and crowd control during important occasions which were regarded as models of planning. He wrote a book on Police Evolution in 1925. Alfred was going to retire in 1938 but was asked to stay on in his post because of the problems of police shortages in the Second World War and he eventually retired in 1944. Alfred had a reputation of being a strong disciplinarian. He died in Halifax in 1951. Alfred Richardson spent 54 years in the Police Force. Major Richardson joined the Birmingham Police Force in 1904 and served in four Divisions between then and 1919. He was transferred to the Chief Constables Office in 1910. Major was named in the newspapers as being a rescuer of many people when he was a passenger in a train which crashed in Bromfield Bridge, Northamptonshire in 1913. He became a Sergeant in 1925 and always remained in the Birmingham area. He was never promoted further and retired in 1939. Major Richardson served in the Police Force for 35 years.

James Richardson was in military uniform at the time of the photograph having joined the Imperial Yeomanry and then the Scottish Light Horse Regiment. Previously in 1896 at Edinburgh he was a 'businessman' and before that he worked in the Birmingham Detective's Office under Superintendent Van Helden. When he was in South Africa he took part in some military skirmishes and in 1902 was in a Column that got shot up and General Lord Melhoun, their leader, was wounded and captured. Trekking through Kerkescorp he wrote in a letter home that he had been in the saddle for twenty eight hours without a break. He left the military 1903 and was working in the Criminal Investigation Department as an Acting Lieutenant Detective. He brought some offenders before a court in Florida Johannesburg which got press coverage. He later left the Police Force. In July 1907 he was working in a Gold Mine at Germiston near Johannesburg and went to rescue two Chinamen who were in some difficulties in a mine shaft. After the rescue James collapsed through breathing in gelignite fumes and died in hospital the following day. He was given, according to the Germiston City News, a "grand funeral in recognition of his attempted heroic rescue". he had been awarded two medals and five clasps during his time in South Africa.



Ralph Richardson was not born until 1886 so he did not get involved with the Birmingham Police. He did however join the South African Police, following his brother James to that country. He was picked as a Constable of the Johannesburg Mounted Police as a special escort to the Duke of Connaught when the Duke was touring the country in 1905. In May 1907 he rode many miles on horseback to be at the bedside of a close cousin Ralph Clutterbuck who was in hospital dying of Diabetes, then in July he was at the bedside of his dying brother James. In December of that year while on duty he apprehended some workers who were committing a crime but they turned a revolver on him and shot him. He died the following day. He was accorded a full Police funeral which was attended by many dignitaries from the city of Johannesburg and was buried next to his brother and cousin in Braamfontein Cemetery Johannesburg. His grave is marked by a very large monument. He had a reputation of being very popular with his fellow policemen and the public. The Transvaal Government handled his Estate very effectively with his brother Alfred Richardson in Halifax acting as Executor. Ralph Richardson was in the South African Police for approximately three years.

Harry Richardson was the only son of Frank Richardson who did not enter the Police Force. He was Articled to the City Surveyor General for Gloucester in 1901 and was living in Bridport, Dorset in 1912. He was a Captain in the Royal Engineers between 1917 and 1919 and then became a Fuel Overseer for Highways in Sussex. In 1934 Harry became Planning Officer for Cuckfield, Sussex a post he held until 1951. He died in 1952.

During the time of two generations the Richardson family contributed a total of 177 years to the Police Service. This is not likely to be repeated.



**THE RICHARDSONS**

**Standing: Major, James (in uniform) Ralph, Harry.  
Seated: Frank (Junior) Frank (Father) Alfred**

