

SUDDEN DEATHS**John Solway (Metropolitan, Warrant No 131271)**

Posted to Paddington in 1947 as a probationer I seemed to keep running into sudden deaths! On my first early turn out alone on a beat off the Harrow Road I was stopped by a young man who said they were worried about the old lady living next door. They could smell gas but could get no reply from knocking.

The premises concerned were a small two up two down house. The young man helped me force the sash window facing on the street. The house was full of gas, so taking a deep breath I climbed in and ran round to open the front door. Another deep breath and I went through to the kitchen. On the floor next to an overturned chair by the small table was the old lady. She was not breathing. After opening the back door into the small garden and the window, I turned the gas oven off. It was turned on but not lit. I carried the old lady out to the front and a neighbour put down a blanket and pillow to lay her on. I asked a bystander to go to a nearby public telephone box and call an ambulance and the police Station. Then I started to give the lady artificial respiration. (Mouth to mouth had not come in at that time) A fire engine turned up having been called by someone. The firemen asked if I would like them to take over the resuscitation. Leaving them to work on the lady I went back to check the house, no one else there. In the oven I saw there was an uncooked rice pudding. The inquest verdict of accidental death came to the conclusion she had put the rice in the oven, turned it on but not lit the gas, there were matches on a shelf nearby. She had sat on a chair by the table and fell off when overcome by the gas. Whilst looking round the kitchen I found a large black cat curled up in a basket, it was not breathing. I picked it up and went out to the front of the house where the firemen were still working on the old lady. With my hands I pressed in and out on the cat's chest. Surprisingly it started to breath and wriggled to be put down. Just at that moment the duty officer, an Inspector came round the corner. He was furious to find me resuscitating a cat whilst firemen were working on the lady.

The story soon went round the station the new PC lost the human victim but saved the cat!

The next week on early turn I was in a residential street in Maida Vale. At about 9-30 I saw a woman standing at her front gate waving frantically at me. I went across and she informed me one of her B & B lodgers was dead in bed, she had dialled 999 and was waiting for Police to turn up. Whilst we were talking the wireless car turned up. After finding out what the score was it was agreed I would deal with the case and the car could go back on the air. They said they would get the station to send the Divisional Surgeon and Coroners Officer. The story from the landlady was that the man, in his early twenties had turned up the afternoon before with a large suitcase, he wanted a room for about three days but said he might stay longer. He did not come down to breakfast at 8 am and at about 8-30 she knocked on the door and reminded him he would miss breakfast. Half an hour later she knocked again. Receiving no response she used her pass key unlocked the door and went in. He was laying in bed as though asleep but when she went to shake him she realised he was dead. The doctor arrived and between us we uncovered the body carefully. He was in pyjamas with no sign of injury or disturbance; the doctor said he had been dead for some hours. I searched the room. A smart suit was hung in the wardrobe. A good watch was on the bedside table with a wallet containing quite a bit of money in notes. There was also some loose change. In the jacket pocket I found a National Identity card with an address in Yorkshire, the last date therein about 18 months ago, also a note book with what looked like phone numbers and names but difficult to decipher with a cursory examination. The suitcase contained clothes and toiletries you would expect a man to carry around when away from home. After the body had been removed to the mortuary I took all the possessions back to the station. A message to the Yorkshire Police brought back the following information. It was the address of his parents he had had a medical and been found fit for National Service but his call up had been deferred because he was studying for some sort of diploma. Having gained the diploma, he was instructed to report to a military establishment. A couple of days before the date he was to report, he drew out all his savings, packed a suitcase and left without saying where he was going to anyone, this was nearly a year before. The parents and his friends had heard nothing from him. Both civil and military police had searched the house a couple of times. A check of the police circulations showed him as wanted for failing to report for National Service. The Detective Sergeant dealing with the case asked me if I would like to come to the autopsy the next morning. When we arrived the Mortuary assistant had laid out the body and taken off the pyjamas. The pathologist came in and as he walked towards the table, he said. 'I think I know why he died. Look at that very dark staining at the back of the head and neck; you don't get that much blood in the head unless a blood vessel is still pumping.' The top of the head was sawn off and the brain extracted. (The C I D officer disappeared outside) The pathologist in triumph showed me and the assistant where a small artery was split. He said this was a fault the victim was born with and the artery could burst at anytime. He was puzzled by the fact the deceased was lying in bed presumably asleep because it normally happened when their blood pressure was raised like when running or playing a vigorous sport, he presumed he might have had a nightmare.

Back at the station I asked my sergeant if I could make some enquiries using the notebook to see what he had been up to whilst missing but was told no. It was death by natural causes. His property would be handed over to the parents who were coming down to identify the body and take it home. I have often wondered what I might have turned up.

The next lot of early turn produced another death!! I was walking past a petrol service station in Marylebone Road at about 7-30 am when this young chap stopped me. He said he was an employee at the station. Normally at this time another employee who lived in a room next to the office had opened up the business. He could see this employee through a window lying on the bed but could not raise him by knocking or shouting. I went to the window and the chap who looked to be about 30 was lying fully dressed on the single bed. Nothing would rouse him. The man who had called me went across to a telephone box and called the manager who turned up very quickly in his car. With his key the room was opened and on examination of the body I could see the man was dead. From the office I called the station for the divisional Surgeon, Coroner's Officer etc.

The Manager said the employee lived in this room as part of his salary. He opened up in the morning and locked up at night Monday to Saturday (closed on Sunday) and generally acted as caretaker. He also served the customers on the forecourt. He had been working there for about two years, never been away on holiday, or had visitors. His meals were usually takeaways or in a local café nearby. He was a very quiet man, rarely spoke unless spoken to, but was very reliable and willing. Whilst waiting for the doctor, I searched the room for any information on next of kin. I found only his discharge paper from the army in 1946. However, what disturbed me I found small envelopes containing money all over the place. When I showed these to the Manager he said they were

his pay packets. Some were unopened. Clearly he had just lived on the tips he received serving on the forecourt and hardly used his pay. I called the station again and asked for assistance. My reporting sergeant turned up and we checked all the money and he said he would take over the case. The cause of death was a heart attack. The enquiries to trace next of kin was unsuccessful so the couple of thousand pounds we found, a lot of money in the 1940s went to the Crown.
 Three sudden deaths in as many weeks; I dreaded early turn!

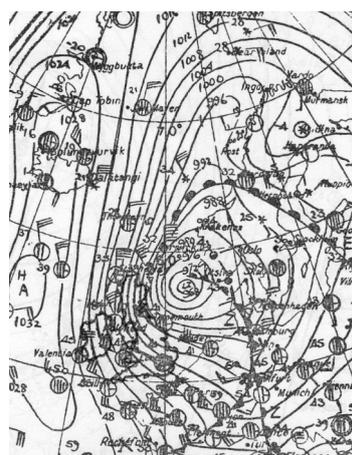
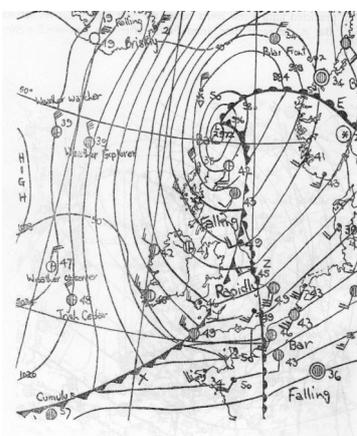
**WHO REMEMBERS?
 Richard Cowley**

The meteorologists had been keeping an eye on 'Low Z' since midnight on Thursday 29 January 1953. Although the pressure was falling steadily, there was nothing menacing at this stage, as the direction was north easterly, away from the British Isles. However, at midnight on Friday 30 January, now being driven by north westerly and then northerly winds, 'Low Z' was pushed south into the North Sea, and at 6am on Saturday 31 January, was just to the east of the Orkney Islands, with the lowest recorded pressure of 968 millibars.

Meanwhile, to the west of the depression, 'High A' was building to 1032 millibars, and moving relentlessly east. This resulted in the isobars being squeezed into an unusually steep pressure gradient, resulting in unprecedented wind speeds. At 6am at Grimsetter on Orkney, a gust of 125 miles per hour was recorded - Hurricane Force 12 on the Beaufort scale is 75 miles per hour!

All through that Saturday, 'Low Z' continued inexorably south down the eastern coast of Scotland and England with no change of pressure. To make matters worse, an abnormally high full moon spring tide was occurring. The combination of this, coupled with the unusually vigorous depression, caused the most devastating storm and flooding this country has ever known - much, much worse than the 'Hurricane' of October 1987. The total death toll was to be 531, with 307 people being drowned in the counties of Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex; and a further 224 sailors drowning in shipwrecks around the coast.

In Lincolnshire flooding occurred from Mablethorpe to Skegness and stretched two miles inland. In Suffolk, 38 people drowned at Felixstowe. In Essex 58 people died on Canvey Island, and another 37 died when the village of Jaywick was washed away.



The progress of the storm - Midnight on Friday 30 January, and Noon on Saturday 31 January 1953.

So it is utterly amazing that this most devastating natural disaster is hardly remembered, and only one book has been written about it, and that for only one county.⁽¹⁾ But what is remembered, is during that one night, an incredible 30 police officers were decorated - 19 for gallantry and 11 for meritorious service - a phenomenon that was unprecedented, even during The Blitz, and has never been matched since.

The gallantry awards appeared in the *London Gazette* of 28 April 1953 (Number 39834), and the Meritorious Service awards (given mainly for rescue co-ordination), appeared in the Birthday Honours List in the *London Gazette* of 1 June 1953 (Number 39863).

NORTH RIDING OF YORKSHIRE CONSTABULARY

For Meritorious Service :

BOWLING, Harold, awarded the **British Empire Medal** as Constable.

LINCOLNSHIRE CONSTABULARY

For Gallantry :

DEPTFORD, Leonard Charles, awarded **The George Medal** as Constable.

The sea defences on the Lincolnshire coast were breached in several places resulting in serious flooding. At Chapel St Leonards, PC Deptford searched a bungalow which had collapsed into the sea, but finding nobody, made his way across the remains of a sea bank to a two storey house where many elderly people were sheltering in upstairs rooms. The foundations had disintegrated and the building was on the point collapse. He roped the persons together and led them to safety across the remains of the sea bank which was being pounded by mountainous waves. All reached safety.

PC Deptford then improvised a raft with empty fuel barrels and rescued an elderly bed-ridden couple from a threatened house by strapping them to stretchers on top of the raft. From another bungalow, he rescued several more elderly persons by leading them across the broken sea-bank, and at one point had to carry two infirm persons across the breaches in the bank. He then continued to assist for the next 24 hours.

'Constable Deptford displayed gallantry of an exceptionally high order in crossing the broken sea wall at the height of a very strong gale and in the face of mountainous seas, and successfully led a most hazardous enterprise'.

LEWIS, Charles, awarded **The George Medal** as Inspector.

When a sea bank collapsed, Mablethorpe police station was