



James Cramer 1915-2010

Police historian, Second World War soldier and Portsmouth City Policeman, James (known as Jim) Cramer died on June 12th at the age of 94 years.

The son of a Portsmouth Dockyard engine fitter, his grandfather had served in the Metropolitan Police at Portsmouth Dockyard. Although becoming a soldier was his boyhood ambition, in 1932 he applied for a job with the Police and went to the Chief Constable's office at the Guildhall. He recalled that 'armed with a letter from my doctor.... I was ushered into the awesome sanction of this great man (Thomas Davies) and saw a huge chap glaring at me over his glasses. I could not understand half of what he was saying, as he had a pronounced Welsh accent.' Young James was asked for his school and sporting achievements and given a spelling test. The Chief asked James 'Can you swim on the buck?' and he replied that he had not heard of that particular stroke. Cramer was told there were no vacancies and later realised that the Chief had meant the 'back stroke'!

Nevertheless Cramer reapplied the following year and was this time offered a post as a police clerk, a job which included answering the telephone, running errands and taking notes, all for the princely sum of 30 shillings a week.

In his autobiography 'Gone for a Soldier' (2004) he recalled this work:

'There were two other boy clerks with me usually in the front office. Our duties were to take down the detectives' reports, first in shorthand and then type them out neatly in reports. Some of the detectives were infuriating in their habits. They gossiped nearly all morning, went drinking during the lunchtime, stayed away from the office nearly all the afternoon and then rushed in about four or five o'clock, bellowing "Boy!" or "Clerk" or "Cramer" and dictated pages of notes which had to be typed out and signed before I went home at 6pm. In those days it wasn't advisable to complain about their behaviour because unemployment was rife and you would be sacked on the spot'.



When Jim had to take notes from members of the Vice Squad he found the experience embarrassing and alarming. These officers dressed up as sailors and frequented urinals in Pompey and as a result received 'invitations' from all manner of people. This was all part of young Cramer's education.

In 1935 he joined Portsmouth Police as Police Constable 97, earning £3 10 shillings a week and being in a job where according to his companions 'the customer is always wrong'. Police duty was hard work with no proper waterproof clothing. Officers wore heavy cloth uniform that took hours to dry and also had to wear greatcoats from 1st October to 1st May whatever the weather. Jim described night duty as a 'real ordeal and sometimes it became almost impossible to stay awake...Strong tea and slabs of bread pudding were taken at Commercial Road fruit and vegetable market to keep us going'.

In 1939 he joined the army, serving in the Grenadier Guards, The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers and the Royal Ulster Rifles. It was with the latter, in the Airborne Division, that he took part in the D Day landings on June 6th 1944, on a Horsa Glider; losing many of his campaign col-



leagues over the following days. Active service in the 'Battle of the Bulge' (in the Belgian Ardennes) and in Palestine followed, returning to Portsmouth Police in 1947.

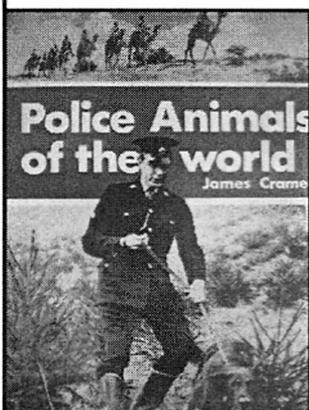
Rebadged PC 211, he found that many of his peers had been promoted during the War.

During the First World War promotions in the police were regarded as 'temporary' so as not to prejudice the chances of those serving in the armed forces. No such allowance was made for World War Two service and he felt aggrieved by that. Although promoted in December 1953 to Sergeant and in March 1959 to Inspector, he always felt he was unfairly overlooked and considered that he had spoken out too much at times to win favour with the powers that be.

Police pay was low in the 1940s and 50s and Jim had a family to support. He said 'we couldn't afford a car, eat out or go on holidays far afield but we just soldiered on with what we had'. In 'Gone for a Soldier' he recounts the regular problems he had with fleas. While in the CID he found that the best thing to do was to hop into an empty bath on getting home, undress and then examine the clothing.

While in the Portsmouth Police he fully engaged in sports and excelling in rowing (he was part of the 1937 Couzens Cup winning City Police team), rugby, boxing and swimming. He also wrote articles for the Police Review and became an author. 'The World's Police' was published by

Cassell & Co. in 1964, featuring police uniforms and potted history throughout the World. The Acknowledgements include the following: 'I am indebted to Colonel Gamal Abdl Nasser for his interest and particularly for his account of the police of Ancient Egypt'. We are informed that the first mention of a police organisation occurs in the time of Hur Moheb (circa 1340 B.C.).



'Police Animals of the World' (Cassell 1968), 'Uniforms of the World's Police' (Charles Thomas 1968) and other books on local and military history followed. 'Police Animals' features dogs, horses, camels and even an Elephant called Irma from Knaresborough Zoo. Irma helped the police retrieve a motor cycle from the River Nidd.

Retiring in 1965, he compiled the first published history of the Portsmouth City Police (Portsmouth Papers no 2) which sold out twice. Teaching and studying followed police work. In the late 1970s he was supervising the Portsea Adolescent Tutorial Centre, even sparing with some of the pupils and earning their respect when he landed a punch on some 'tough guy'.

We have a lot to thank Jim Cramer for. He helped to rescue and preserve much of the history of Portsmouth Police. His collection of papers has been deposited with Portsmouth City Records Office. He led a full and active life and will long be remembered.

Clifford Williams



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