

Station Sergeant Henry Skeates

Henry Steven Skeates was born in Ashford, Kent on October 19, 1876, spending all of his youth in the county. Following his education in the Ashford National School, Henry was apprenticed to one of the local newspapers, "The Kentish Times", as a compositor. It was a trade he thoroughly disliked, but a skill he was never to forget.

As a means of providing him with a degree more variety in his life he played football for Ashford United, his local team, and volunteered as a private in the 1st East Kent Regiment, he served with them for four years.



A section of the 1st East Kent Regiment in 1897
Henry Skeates is second from the left in the rear row of the group.

On March 14, 1898, at the age of 21 years, Henry found the final answer to his quest for a vocation when he joined the Metropolitan Police as a constable with the warrant number 83849.

His initial police service, as PC 242G, was around Stoke Newington in East London. Making use of his prior position as goal keeper in the Ashford United team, 'G' Division selected Henry for their divisional soccer squad. From the 1901-2 season the team was increasingly successful and in the 1902-3 season reached the final of the prestigious "Lady Bradford Challenge Cup", only to be beaten in the final match of the season by the men of 'J' Division. The following season they again met 'J' in the final and this time made good to take the cup. The winning team were photographed with the Lady herself and the then Commissioner, Edward Henry, the full story duly appearing in a September 1904 issue of the "Police Review and Parade Gossip".

G DIV. METROPOLITAN POLICE FOOTBALL TEAM.

P.C. OLVER. P.C. HAYDON. P.C. HAYWARD. P.C. SKEATES. P.C. CHILDS. P.C. COOMBS.
P.C. BROWN. P.C. ABERBERLY. P.C. BRAIN, Hon. Sec. P.C. WALKER. P.C. SYGROVE.



CHIEF INSPR. TRIEBY, Vice-President. SUPT. HAMMOND, President. SUB-DIV. INSPR. BRIGGS, Vice-President.
P.C. SMITH, Captain. P.C. FERN.

THE G DIVISION METROPOLITAN POLICE FOOTBALL TEAM.

WINNERS OF THE "LADY BRADFORD" CHALLENGE CUP, 1902-3.

When the G Division first entered a team to play for the "Lady Bradford" Challenge Cup in the season 1901-2, they showed moderately fair form, and finished the season sixth in a list of the sixteen clubs who competed. During the interval between the seasons a few members joined their ranks, who not only came with good credentials as footballers, but who, contrary to the established rule, were able to justify their reputations, and early in the season 1902-3 it was very easy to see that they had got together an exceedingly strong combination, which it would be very hard to beat. The team which is depicted above played together right manfully and unselfishly. They played to win, with the result that they came out on top of the championship table with the following record:—Matches played, 24; won, 18; lost, 1; drawn, 5; points, 41. They were, however, closely run by the J (Bethnal Green) Division, who last season "turned the tables upon them."

The photograph represents Supt. Hammond, president, with that coveted trophy, the "Lady Bradford" Challenge Cup, in charge, supported by Chief Insp. Triebly and S.D.-Insp. Briggs, vice-presidents of the club. These Officers are very interested in their team, and pleased to see them win.

Space will not allow us to say much about the individual play of members of the team.

SKEATES is a fine goal-keeper, and previous to joining the Force used to fill a similar position for Ashford United.

SMITH, the captain of the team, plays left back, which post is not better filled by any man in the Metropolitan Police. He learnt his football at Bristol, where he played for Staple Hill when they won the Western League in 1889.

WALKER, the right back, played for Gainsborough Trinity in the English League matches, Division II.

ABERBERLY, the left-half, took his lessons whilst at Gravesend with the Church Institute Club.

FERN, the centre half, did service with Watford, and CHILDS, the right half, used to play prominently for Hertford Town.

BROWN, the outside left, used to belong to Hereford United, and HAYWARD, the inside left, as a youngster put in some good work for Rochester.

BRAIN, the centre forward, before he migrated from the "Land of Cakes," played for the Glasgow Rangers. Since being in London he has won a London Football Association badge, and occasionally assists the London Caledonians. He is fast and resolute, and a dead shot.

HAYDON, the inside right, has seen service abroad, is an old Army player, and fills his position in the team with credit to himself and profit to his club.

COOMBS, the outside right, has assisted

Somerset County, is a fine player, and frequently sends in "screw" shots which are difficult to stop.

OLVER, who, as will be seen, carried the flag, acted as trainer. He is a good reserve player and generally useful. He used to play Rugby in Devon, whilst SYGROVE relieves the secretary of a good deal of his clerical work.

A UNIQUE TESTIMONIAL.—Inspector Downing, of the Backup Force, has been the recipient of a testimonial as unique as it is pleasing. It is in the shape of a pipe and tobacco pouch, accompanied by a letter, and the sender is a person whom it was the Inspector's duty some little time ago to arrest and bring before the Magistrates, on a very serious charge. Mr. Downing, however, carried out his duty in such a way as to earn the deep gratitude of the then prisoner, and this is conveyed in the letter in very admirable and choice terms. Testimonials of this description, we should imagine, are very rare, and it is a high compliment to Inspector Downing to have been the recipient of such a one.

ACCIDENT TO A TAUNTON CONSTABLE.—While being towed on an ordinary bicycle behind a motor bicycle at Blackford, near Taunton, recently, P.C. Spiller, of Street, in trying to avoid passing over a large stone, turned a little too far, so that the machine swerved to one side and was then pulled clean over by the tow of the motor in front. The Officer was stunned for some little while, and the left side of his face was severely grazed. His injuries were attended to at Taunton, and he returned to Street later in the day.

At that time Henry was still intent on thrusting forward his career, and six years after joining the police, having passed exams for promotion to sergeant, on October 26, 1904 he transferred to undertake service at HM Dockyard Chatham, Kent as PS 29 of the Dockyard Division, Metropolitan Police. Although detached from the Met, along with

other dockyard distant from the Metropolis this section at Chatham was policed by the London force from 1860 to 1932, as the Dockyard Division officers serving there wearing the standard uniform with slightly different emblems, an anchor and crown replacing the divisional letter. As a single man he was accommodated in the dock barracks, what we would now term as the section house.

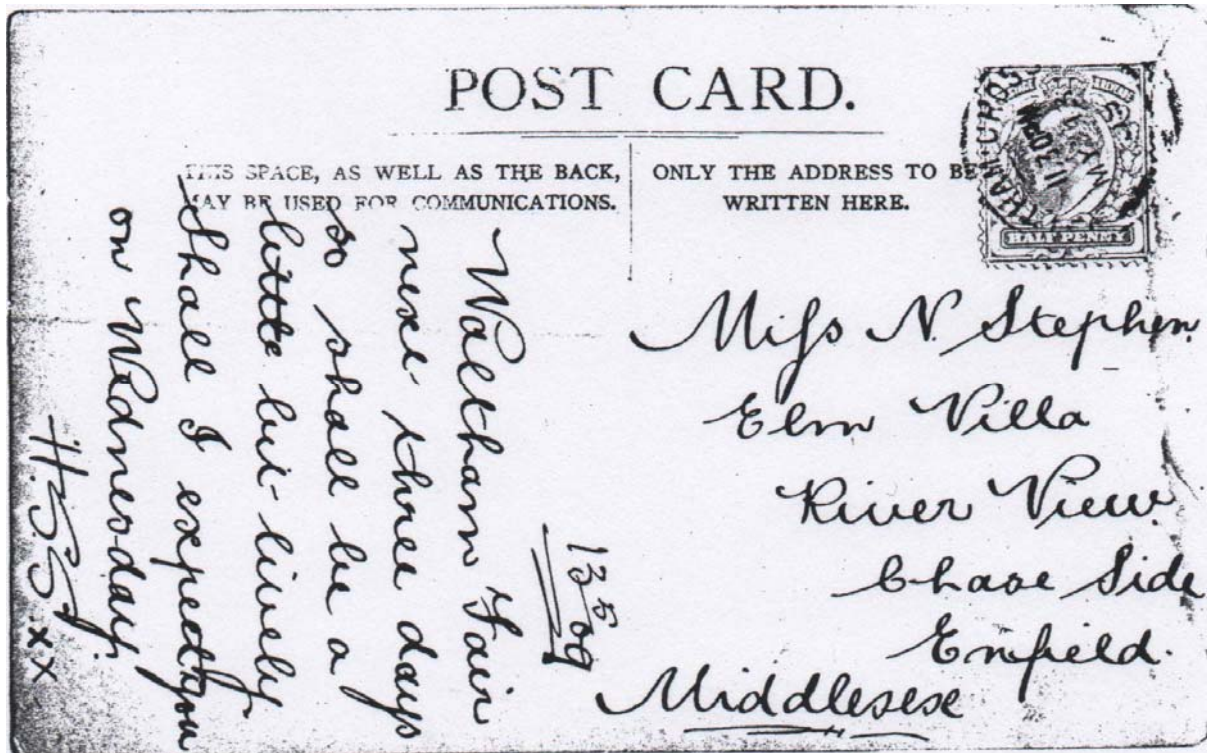


CHATHAM DOCKYARD c1903

The second figure from the right is PS 29 Henry Skeates. You may be able to see that in addition to the number 29 there is an anchor and crown of the Dockyard Division which replaced the normal divisional letters on the collar and in the centre of the helmet plate badge. It is unfortunate that the Crystal Palace poster behind Skeates was bashfully hiding behind the post which leaves us guessing the date as June or July in a year between 1905 and 1908.

At the age of 32 Henry was still unmarried and still serving within the relative isolation of the docks when he was further promoted to the rank of station sergeant. Denoted, at that time, by the seemingly incongruous use of four stripes, or chevrons, in later years (1921) the fourth stripe was replaced with a crown. Posted to 'N' Division as SPS 13N and, upon presenting himself at the head station he found himself posted to the Enfield Highway sub-division and then to the sectional station at Waltham Abbey. This choice may have been guided by his prior experience with the military hierarchy at the docks, as Waltham Abbey then had two police stations, the second being that of the War Department within the Royal Gun Powder Factory (RGPF) and a further connection with the nearby Royal Small Arms Factory police station at Enfield Lock. Although in charge of the town police station, the same one in use today, Henry had to ensure that manpower was maintained in the factories - even if that ultimately required officers patrolling the street to be called into the factory sites.

Although the RGPF boasted a barracks of sorts it was not now in keeping with his rank, a factor resulting in him finding private lodgings in the town at 4 (now 7) Broom Hall Road. Now able to distance himself from the restrictions brought about by living upon police premises, Henry was soon courting a Miss Steven [coincidentally also his middle name] from Enfield. Miss Steven was the recipient of a post card dating from May 1909 which featured a photograph of Henry and another sergeant, PS 104N Fletcher, in Epping Forest.

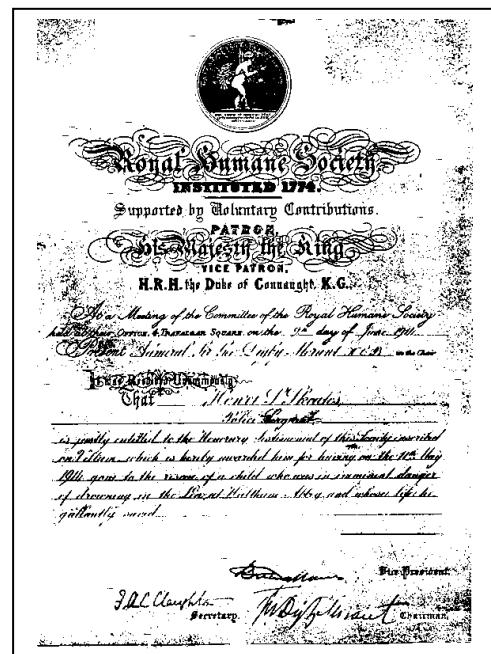


It was the text on this card which harkened back to days of a far better postal service, for the price of just half a penny (0.2p) Henry was able to write and tell of his duties the following day (Waltham Fair) and be certain that although post franked at 11.30pm she would receive it early on the following day.

On October 3, 1910 Henry married Elizabeth Steven, 13 years his junior, at Enfield and they moved their lodgings from Broom Hall Road a hundred yards up the road to 2 Dersham Villas in Honey Lane, a house now simply known as 24 Honey Lane. Their first child was born at the house in 1914, the same year as he was awarded a certificate for the vain attempt at life-saving of a four year old child drowned in the Cornmill Stream.

In spite of holding a military reserve status, reinforced in 1911 by the issue of a Territorial Force notification card, unlike many others Henry was not recalled to the colours when war broke out in August 1914. It is probable that a combination of his age, rank and the status of police being a reserved occupation saved him from the horrors of the trenches.

Later in the war, in August 1918, the police went on strike. For a long time living conditions had been bad for the men and their families. Earnings eroded by wartime inflation had only partly been made up by extra allowances ceded by the government. Still faced by the rigors of war the Government agreed to wide ranging reforms to



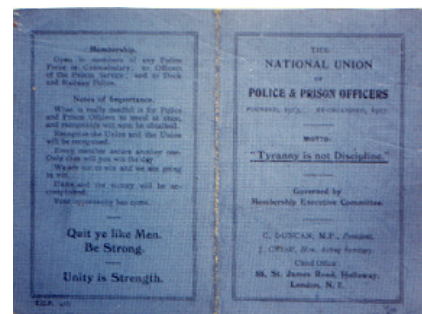
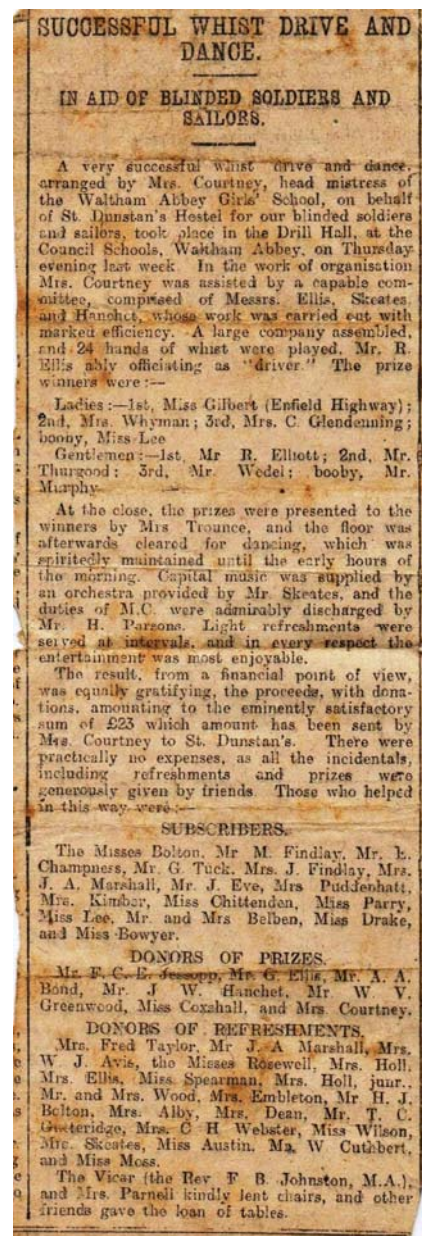
placate the police and took no measures against the strikers.

Although none of the men under Henry went out on strike, it was largely undertaken by younger elements in inner areas, a direct personal result of the action was that he joined the, illegal, National Union of Police and Prison Officers (NUPPO) for the first time in spite of its continued status as a proscribed organisation. Although not officially declared, the official side turned a blind eye to officers involved in this increase in members.

At the end of the war the Government failed to meet its stated obligations under the temporary agreement and unrest again grew in the ranks of the police and voiced through the NUPPO. Although the union membership had swollen dramatically since the first strike, it remained illegal to be a member and various threats against its members were again issued against serving officers by Authority. It became clear to many that it was time for individuals to distance themselves from the fledgling union. When, in August 1919, a further police strike took place in London and Liverpool, Henry was able to hold the men under his command back from the brink. Others, perhaps not so well counselled went forward with the withdrawal of labour and street protests; they were summarily sacked for striking and never regained their jobs as the Government, no longer constrained by war, wreaked vengeance on them.

Other than pay rates, one of the major complaints that led to the strike was the stringent enforcement of regulations that took place by senior ranks. Although he may well have been 'guilty' of such enforcement in his early days, after a short period at Waltham Abbey and marriage, he mellowed and his advancement through the ranks quickly slowed to a grinding halt. Anything that may have been spared the junior ranks was certainly re-directed at law enforcement, he was well known for the harshness of his dealings with market traders - although the sight of a senior police rank attending a market stall with a ring gauge to check upon the size and quality of the goods, including vegetables, must seem strange today.

Finally on April 5, 1925, after 27 years service, sixteen of them at Waltham Abbey, Henry Skeates retired from the Metropolitan Police..



At a parting ceremony he was presented with a fine engraved gold pocket watch, a gift from the officers and men of the Enfield Highway sub-division and those of the newly formed War Department police, recently formed to take over the RGPF and RSAF. The inscription reads:-

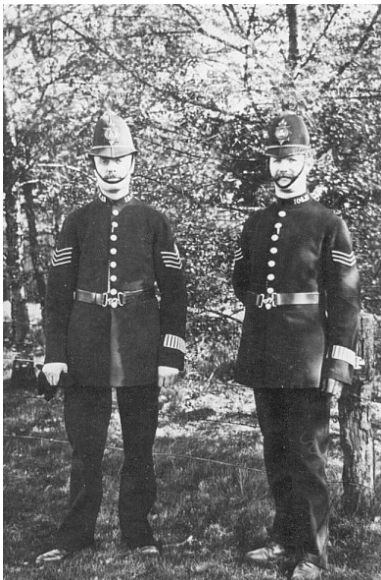
"Metropolitan Police. Presented to ex-SPS Skeates by the officers and men of the Enfield Highway and War Dept. sub-divs. on his retirement after 27 years service 5.4.1925"

Shortly after retiring Henry and his family packed their bags and moved to Ipswich, Suffolk. Although members of his family were to make the pilgrimage some sixty years later, he never returned to Waltham Abbey.

Henry found new employment soon after moving to Ipswich in the field of race course security, but soon tired of that and took up the more traditional occupation of former police officers - bailiff.

During the Second World War he again donned khaki for the first time since 1898 (and his time of service with the East Kent's), when he took up with the Ipswich Home Guard at the age of 63. At the end of the war, at the age of 68, he finally retired. After meeting the dream most of us have (but frequently fail to attain), retirement in excess of the years in the police, Henry Steven Skeates died peacefully on February 5, 1964 aged 87. He had been out of the job for almost 39 years.

It is surprising that a man who left the town that witnessed the greater part of his police service almost immediately for distant parts was still remembered with some affection by some of the older generation even before his family came in search of their roots. It is both the mark of the man and says much of his real service to the community. I very much doubt that the people of either G or Chatham divisions had the same kind thoughts of the man in his time, any more than they would have such thoughts of the fleeting appearances of the modern day graduate police officers. Unfortunately such men lead policy and fail to appreciate such niceties as service to the public.



1909 in No1's with PS Fletcher



c1920 in day-to-day attire with PC's Elliott and Godden