

Interview with Mrs Freda Philp (nee Pawley) at her Flat in St Martin's Avenue, Epsom, Tuesday, 19 January 1993.

IM How old were you when Epsom Police Station was attacked by the Canadian Soldiers and where were you at the time?

FP I was 15 years of age at the time (19 June 1919). The whole family was upstairs. The Police Station was converted into family quarters to accommodate us. There were 8 of us. When the Canadians surrounded the house, we were terrified. There was Ernie, my younger brother, Hilda, Doris, Mabel, myself and Harry, my older brother, my mother and father, of course.

IM How many rooms did you have upstairs?

FP There were 3 bedrooms (the girls had to share). The two boys had the front room and our parents had the third one. There was the bathroom, a large kitchen-cum dining room, a scullery, a huge coal range in the kitchen and, of course, the sitting room. All this was the top floor of the ground floor Police Station. Our bedrooms were over the cells. Sometimes we heard the "ritual" of change of shifts that took place in The Parade Room underneath.

IM Did you get much shouting and banging?

FP Oh yes, especially after the Races when the cells used to get filled up with drunks and disorderly.

IM I suppose you had to take the good with the bad. What were the good things?

FP Father did not have to go far to work, so he was always around. We had a very happy childhood. We went to Pound Lane School.

IM Did your friends tease you about it?

FP Oh no, they had respect; "Our father is the Master of the Police Station, so you better remember", so to speak.

IM What was your father's work?

FP He was an Inspector. He started off as a village boy from the bottom and worked his way up, first as a Sergeant, then Inspector. My parents came to London from Cornwall (Devonport). We were born in London, except Nina.

IM Was it a very secure job? How many years was he in his job?

FP Well, he carried on after his retirement, because as the War started, he was asked to stay on.

IM How old was he during the riots?

FP He was quite young. When he retired he was in his fifties. He was presented with this marble clock to go on the mantelpiece, with an inscription.

After the riots, all the policemen who protected the station were given gold watches. Harry, my older brother, who helped, was given a silver watch and my mother was presented with a small lady's watch, which we donated to the Bow Street Police Museum at a presentation. The Hinton family donated their watch too on the same occasion. Harry had dad's gold watch which he did not want to part with. Harry was presented also with a silver cigarette case by Sir Rowland and Lady Blade, local JP.

IM You all deserved the tokens. You must have been very proud of them.

- FP Oh yes, very proud. It was a terrible experience. All the windows were smashed in. The bedrooms were covered in glass. We had a little pantry and we hid there, the younger ones. We could not escape because they blocked all exits, but they never got in through the door. They managed to open one cell. It went on all night. We couldn't come down at all, because to get out we had to go through the front door. Mother and sisters Mabel and Doris tended to the wounded.
- IM It must have been terrible for your father, knowing you were upstairs and he was pretty helpless.
- FP Yes, it was very hard for him. He received a gashing blow over his head too.
- IM What happened later?
- FP The damage was repaired, then father retired. Someone else took over the Police Station. I think his name was Inspector Jeffs. Then it was bombed in the Second World War when the top floor went and later it was demolished altogether and the Police Station was moved to Church Street. When my father retired, we rented a house in Station Road. That's Upper High Street where the present car park is. It was No 54. The house belonged to Mr Golby who lived next door. My sister, Mabel, was a post-woman in Epsom. (Both my sisters. Mabel and Lucy were May Queens in Pound Lane School).
- My sister, Lucy, worked for Elphick the fishmongers at the top of the High Street.
- IM Let's go back to the Police Station. I see pictures of a garden.
- FP Yes, at the back of the Police House we had a large garden and a greenhouse. In his off duty hours, my father used to spend a great deal of time gardening.
- IM So you were a local girl and went to Pound Lane School. What happened then?
- FP After the War, when I left school, I went to work for FW of Six (?) Grocers in South Street. I worked there for four years. They closed down. I went to work for the Co-op in East Street in 1922. I was there for 42 years, not all the time in East Street. I moved when they moved. Just before World War 2, they decided to do their own book-keeping and I was given the job of book-keeper. I was doing all the books and wages. I was there till I retired in 1964.
- IM When did you marry?
- FP When I retired at 60, I went on a holiday and met my future husband, Andrew Philp, ten years older. We got married in St Martin's in 1965, married by Canon Percel. After mother died, aged 48 (?) in 1945 of cancer, the lease on the house in Upper High Street expired. We moved to a house along East Street, Epsom Road, "Homedean", it's now flats, in 1937. Then we moved to No 7 Chase End, Harry and I. Harry never married and suffered from his War injuries all his life and towards the end, he was blind. He never applied for his disability pension. I promised to look after him. I asked for his permission for Andrew to move in. Andrew died in 1978.
- IM Were policemen well paid in those days?
- FP No, very poorly, so my father had his pension during his lifetime and my mother had just enough to get by when he died, but we were comfortable. We never bought a house, but we did buy a car and Harry drove it.
- IM What was the social standing of the police in those days?
- FP People who remembered him always spoke well of my father and, of course, after the riots he was well respected and seen as a bit of a hero.

IM As a school girl, how did your school mates react to the events?

FP Oh, I was admired and envied.

IM When did you move here?

FP After Andrew died I moved to St Martin's "to the flats, because the house and the garden became too much work.

IM Did you know PC Green, who was murdered, and his family?

FP Yes, we knew his daughters, who also went to Pound Lane School. After the events, they went to Canada, to relatives, and eventually married Canadians, but when they had the 50th Anniversary in 1969, one came over and we were invited to the Police Station to meet her. Inspector Ebon invited us and we had a long re-union and even corresponded for a while.

IM What else do you remember of the horrible day?

FP PC Green. When he was wounded, he was carried to Mr Pollhill's house, the butcher, which was opposite, then to Epsom District Hospital where he died next morning.

IM What happened to your younger brother, Ernest?

FP He married. He worked for the railways and then moved to Basingstoke. He then went on the buses. He died in 1959. He was quite young then. He had children, but I don't hear from them - 3 sons and 1 daughter. Raymond, one of his sons, was killed in an air crash and Ernie, who was ill at the time, died shortly after.

IM Can I take you back to the Police Station? Did it have electricity, running water?

FP We had gas lighting. We had running cold water. We had a bathroom and a big kitchen range and a gas stove and gas copper. The building went back a long way. The middle window was the bathroom, the two on each side were bedrooms. The sitting room was at the back, so was the kitchen-diner and one bedroom and, of course, the large garden. Ashley House, where Mr Reginald White lived with his mother, had a very large garden at the back too.

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