The Romford Times of 29th January 1919 reported the following story "Policemen's Retirement - Sensational Incidents of Long Careers. Two venerable policemen, both of whom are stationed at Romford, will retire from the Essex Constabulary this week on pensions, after long careers which have been marked by many sensational incidents. They are Constable 123 Charles Henry Cook and Constable 124 James Drew. Both of them wear the Star of Merit awarded for conspicuously courageous conduct while in the execution of their duty.

The most sensational incident of Cook's career occurred over 20 years ago at Pebmarsh, where he had to face a terrible situation such as it is fortunately the lot of few policemen to be called upon to face. He was called on the morning of 2nd September 1896 to a farm where a madman had murdered another man. He found the murderer in a state of frenzy, walking about with his victim's head in a bowl under one arm and with two dead chickens and a gun in the other hand. PC Cook secured the formidable knife with which the awful deed had been committed, which was sticking out of the murderer's pocket, and after an exhausting and dangerous encounter with the madman he managed to secure him and take him in custody to Halstead. The subsequent legal proceedings resulted in great commendation of the brave constable's pluck and resource and in official recognition, which included a substantial monetary reward, and the bestowal of the Star of Merit. During his career PC Cook has been in many tight corners with roughs, but has always held his own. He recalls an unusual incident in connection with an extensive corn-stealing case in 1891 when he drove a three horse lead of stolen corn from Halstead to Chelmsford to form evidence against the accused persons at the Essex Assizes."

Charles was not the first policeman in his family. Marshall Cook had been the doyen of an ageing Essex Constabulary. When Admiral McHardy retired in 1881 after 41 years service, the new Chief Constable, Major W.H. Poyntz, probably would not have accepted such venerable officers as this Stebbing village policeman. Born in 1818 the son of a Lawford labourer, single and a former soldier he joined the Constabulary in 1846 and was still serving at the age of 63 in 1881. As Constable 9 he was first stationed at Chelmsford, then Toppesfield, where he married. In the 1851 census the family lived at Causeway, Toppesfield, in the 1861 census they were at Manor Farm, Toppesfield and in the census of 1871 they were living at The Cottage, Street, Toppesfield. The family consisted of Ann, Alfred, Matilda, Alma, Sarah Ann, Emily, John Marshall, Harriet, Elizabeth, Emma, Charles, Isabella Jane, Adolphus and Bertha. The 1881 census shows them living at Bran End, Stebbing and they had been joined by Alfred (8) and Edwin. Alfred was Ann's illegitimate son, but he may have been adopted by Marshall who was shown on his marriage certificate as his father.
In the 1891 census Marshall was living at Stebbing on 2/6d per day pension. He died in 1895 aged 77.

His second son John Marshall Cook was baptised at Toppesfield in 1861 and joined, as Constable (third class) with his father's old collar number (9), in January 1882, ten days after his father retired. Formerly a carman by occupation, he was posted to Brentwood where he was charged in August 1882 with ‘highly irregular conduct’, receiving a severe reprimand. In December 1882 he was fined 10/- for being under the influence of drink; and in February 1883 "for neglect in not attending the County horse and using disrespectful language to Inspector Allen", reduced back to the third class for two months. His luck finally ran out when he was dismissed in March 1883 after visiting and drinking in six public houses whilst on duty. His collar number (9) passed to the future famous detective David Scott. [See History Notebook No. 23] His brother Charles Henry Cook was attested as Constable 94. Born at Toppesfield in 1867, he was formerly a baker with George Capp of Prittlewell. In February 1888, at Chelmsford, he was cautioned for being "absent from his beat".

From March 1888 to December 1889 he was stationed at Brentwood and married in that month. His wife Sarah, from Southend, had a daughter Lily Alma in 1890. The effects upon his family of subsequent removals consequent upon his chosen lifestyle can be imagined. In December 1889 he was posted to Saffron Walden, as groom, and they are shown in the April 1891 census. In May he went to fill a vacancy at Halstead and was there until March 1893. Posted to Alphamstone until October he transferred to Pebmarsh for “benefit of service.” In December 1893 he was disciplined for “being under the influence of drink and for improper conduct” and fined 10/- . On 2nd December 1896, for his action in the Pebmarsh murder case, the Standing Joint Committee promoted him Acting Sergeant and awarded £10 and the Merit Star.

The Pebmarsh phase of his career was to end on an unhappy note. The Essex County Chronicle of Friday 23rd June 1899 reported the following story “Policeman Charged at Halstead. At the petty session, Acting Sergeant Cook was charged with assaulting William and Abraham Bocking at Little Mapestead on 31st March. The defendant did not appear.

H.W. Jones, prosecuted and W. H. Leycester defended. Wm. Bocking said that on Good Friday night he went into The Cock Inn, Mapestead at about 8 o'clock. Sergeant Cook was there in uniform. During the evening a man named Hume complained about the quality of some brandy, saying he would have it analysed. Sergeant Cook told the man to "drink it, deliver up the glass, and —— off." He then told Bocking to go home, and said he should...
have no more beer. Bocking started to go home, but when he got about 30 yards from the public house Cook followed him and hit him across the head behind the right ear with a stick or truncheon, which "unsensed" him. Bocking said he was not drunk and had no quarrel with Cook during the evening. His brother Robert helped him up and took him home. He could not say whether Cook was drunk or not.

Arthur Turner (17), a labourer, said he went into the inn and saw Sergt. Cook there. Turner left with Bocking and was walking down the road with him, when Cook came running up and knocked the complainant down with a blow behind the ear. He told Cook's barrister that he thought Cook was the worse for beer. Harry Butcher (16) and Robert Bocking, a bricklayer, gave similar evidence, the latter stating that Cook was "not drunk, but the worse for beer." Robert Bocking went up to Cook and asked him what he had knocked his brother down for, and Cook told him he did not do it. Cook then told the witness that if he said anything he would "lump" him on the head. He told him to do it, which Cook did, whereupon Bocking struck back. Abraham Bocking, 70, labourer, said that as he was going home from 'The Cock' he spoke to Cook and told him he should have not knocked his son down. Cook never replied but struck the witness two or three times on the head, Mr Leycester - "I suggest to you that Cook was on the ground, being kicked by several people, when he let out with his truncheon to defend himself, and he accidentally hit you. Is that true?" Abraham Bocking: "No sir." Ada Bocking, wife of Robert Bocking, said she saw Cook knock William down. In the scrimmage she was knocked down herself, but whether that was incidental on the part of Cook she could not say. Sydney Bocking, labourer, deposed to hearing the blows which his father received from Cook. This was the case for the prosecution; Mr Leycester asked for a remand, so that Cook might attend. The Chairman George Courtauld and Harry Hills J.P. adjourned the case for 14 days. Their opinion was that, when such a charge was made out against a public official, it should be thoroughly thrashed out in the public interest".

The Essex County Chronicle for Friday 7th July 1899 reported: "For the defence, the defendant said that 'on Good Friday he was on duty in front of the 'Cock Inn' Little Maplestead at 9pm and saw the complainant Wm. Bocking, come out of the inn, using very bad language. Witness advised him to go home, but after going away and coming back again he went up to Cook, who thought by his attitude that he meant to row, so he walked away. It was absolutely untrue that he followed Bocking 30 yards down the road then hit him with a stick on the head. About 10 o'clock all the family of the Bockings came out of the public house. Cook stood in the middle of the road when he
was struck on the head by Robert Bocking with a stick. While he was on the ground he was kicked and trodden upon. He drew his truncheon to defend himself, and knocked the first one down he came to, who happened to be old Abraham Bocking. Beyond that, he did not hit anyone that night.

Cross-examined by Mr Jones, Cook said that he went into ‘The Cock’ about 7.30pm and had a glass of beer and a pennyworth of biscuits. He was asked if he wished the bench to believe that he had only had one glass of beer. He replied “No, sir, I believe that I had a drink with a man named Coe.” “Do you know that old man?” indicating Abraham Bocking. “Yes, sir, Too well!” “Why do you say ‘Too well?’” “He threatened me last harvest.” Dr C. Gordon Roberts said Cook went to him about midnight on Good Friday, covered with mud from head to foot. He had a large contused wound on the left side of the jaw, which had been bleeding freely, and covered his face with blood. There were also other bruises. He told Mr Jones that Cook was excited but not drunk. John Coe, a gamekeeper, said he heard Robert Bocking say he would “let the —— know” for knocking his brother down. Cook was knocked down quite suddenly. Walter Layzell, blacksmith, said Cook was perfectly sober. Samuel Whybrow, landlord of the ‘Cock Inn’ said that neither Cook nor any of the Bockings was drunk. There was no cause for Cook to interfere. The court retired to consider their verdict and on their return the Chairman said that as the evidence was so conflicting, the bench would dismiss the case. A charge against Robert Bocking of assaulting Cook, was withdrawn by Cook’s solicitor."

Cook was posted to Maldon in May 1899 and, surprisingly, promoted in September. As a full sergeant he no longer had a collar number. In February 1902, for the “benefit of service” he was posted to Clacton. In June, charged with “discreditable conduct”, he was fined 10/- and removed to Braintree, until September, when, for “misconduct and gross neglect of duty” he was reduced to constable (number 123). Posted to Brightlingsea, within a week he was again in trouble. In July 1903 “drinking in a public house whilst on duty” he was fined 15/-. Posted on to Kirby in 1907 to “fill a vacancy” he was there until 1909. For unspecified “misconduct” he was posted to Romford. He was injured in a crowd when on duty and was sick from January to February 1910 with rib injuries. In 1914 for “leaving his beat without permission and being insolent to his sergeant”, he was fined 5/- and cautioned. From October 1916 to February 1917 he was on sick leave having been assaulted on duty. On 25th January 1919 he was pensioned with £86-18-1d per annum. His pay on joining was £1-2s-2d per week, thirty years later it was £2-10-0d per week.