



History Notebook 62

The Story of Alice Maud WILSON

By Retired Essex Police Sergeant Marion Young

Alice Maud WILSON was one of the first women to work for the police in Essex and was stationed at Romford during the Great War. However, she had no police powers to arrest offenders. This is apparent from incidents recorded in her pocket notebook which is held at the Essex Police Museum.

Women were not recruited as police officers with powers to enforce the law until the 1940s. Prior to this time the role was viewed by Chief Officers as a job that only men could perform. Women mainly dealt with cases involving women and children.

Background on Alice

She was born Alice Maud MARTIN in 1876 at Grays, Essex.

She is shown in the 1881 census, living at the back of 17 Reid Row Cottages, Orsett Road, Grays, as the 5 year old daughter of Samuel and Esther MARTIN.

She married Arthur Alexander WILSON at St Clements Church, West Thurrock on Christmas Day 1894. Her husband worked as a gas fitter at Romford Gasworks.

In the 1911 census they are shown as living at 43 Cotleigh Road, Romford, Essex with their four children, the youngest of whom was Herbert Charles aged 2 years.

Women in the Essex Constabulary during The Great War

Women were recruited during the Great War to a number of jobs in the community which were traditionally undertaken by men and the police service was no exception, but they were paid less than the men for undertaking police duties.

Alice was a member of the National Union of Women Workers.

By 1900 the N.U.W.W had set up a number of special committees, to focus on particular issues involving women. One of the best known of these was the Women Patrol Committee (later known as the Women's Police Committee). About the same time, the organisation began its campaign for 'Equal Pay for Equal Work' and was particularly concerned with the position of women in the armed forces.



Alice worked at the new police station in South Street, Romford, Essex which opened in 1894. By 1914 the police staff was a superintendent, 5 sergeants and 31 constables. Her police pocket notebook was issued on 3rd August 1918.

Her main duties were street patrols in Romford and dealing with matters involving women and children; usually they concerned immorality issues. This is evidenced by a case recorded in her pocket notebook where a young 13 year-old girl has become pregnant and it is suspected that a local soldier is responsible.

Transcript from Alice Maud Wilson's Pocket Note Book

Fri 30th Aug 1918 was asked by Supt HOWLETT to make inquiries about a girl called Florence PORT / PERRY age 13 last December suspected of being pregnant. Living at 131 Marlborough Rd went there saw girl and her mother, denied any wrong but I asked to examine her and found she was pregnant about 5 to 6 months, asked her particulars, she said she went fishing also where she went with the man and where the offence took place. It is a very dreary place. Asked her mother if she would like her to be examined by a doctor. She said yes. Miss Jordon 2478 went with me to Doctor WRIGHT with Florence and her mother. Doctor WRIGHT examined her told me she was between 5 to 6 months pregnant.



The following day Alice records that she goes with Florence who shows her the location near a brook where the man took her fishing, gave her sweets and allegedly sexually assaulted her on four occasions.

Tues 3rd Sept 1918 visited Marlborough Rd to see if we could get any more information from Florence PORT.

To 19 George Street to enquire about a George Frederick Carrollhad moved to Little Ilford Lane, brother lives at 2 mill Terrace Wheatsheaf Rd, joined the army 3 years ago

On Thurs 26th Sept 1918 went to 131 Marlborough Rd to make final arrangements for Florence PORT to enter home at Stoke Newington the following day.

In relation to the alleged suspect in this case, Alice records the following information in her notebook.

Description of man who is supposed to assault Florence PORT 131 Marlborough Rd Romford

Man 5ft 5 or 5ft 6 , middle, colour green grey eyes, brown trilby hat, dark overcoat Mixture also coat blue, cloth trousers sailor pattern, laced boots, clear complex good teeth one bad one in upper jaw, single breasted coat

And there this story ends. There is nothing further recorded about this case. No record can be found to indicate if Florence went on to have a live birth and, if so, where the child was born.

(The 1911 census shows Florence PERRY aged 6 years living with her parents George William PERRY (a farm labourer), Elizabeth PERRY (nee PORT) and two younger siblings. Sadly, by the time the incident occurred

resulting in her pregnancy, poor Florence had lost her father. He was killed in action on 6th August 1915 at Gallipoli, aged just 29 years.)

Alice made numerous enquiries to try to trace George Frederick Carroll but appears to have been unsuccessful.

It is not known if he was located, interviewed, or charged with the alleged offence.

(24th March 1914 George F CARROLL, born 1897, joined the Territorial Force, 203, 2nd Essex Battery, 2nd East Anglian Brigade, Royal Field Artillery HQ Romford. He was discharged 24th April 1915. By 1924 he had bought a house in Richmond Road, Ilford for his wife, whom he had married 26th January 1918, and for his three children. In May 1931 his wife applied for a separation on the grounds of alleged desertion and neglect to provide reasonable maintenance for her and the children. His address at the court hearing is given as Marlborough Rd, Romford.)



Romford Division, 1918

Other entries in her pocket note book:-

Tues 20th August 1918attended court re Lizzie WRIGHT charged with wilful murder of grandchild Beatrice GOLD aged 1 year 11 months at 5 Albert Road Romford

26 August 1918.....given information regards a girl called HUGH living at Marlborough Rd carrying on with German prisoners

Wednesday 28th August 1918South Street, Mawneys Rd, Marlborough Rd to inquire about a girl named HUGH, was told the girls and women make a great fuss of German prisoners...give them chocolates and fags

Tues 29th October 1918....14 Heath Drive to tell parents of Edwin James Parker that no inquest will be held on him and burial order can be obtained at 214 Victoria Rd Romford

Thursday 28th November 1918....was walking past the Midland Railway with Miss JORDAN WP 2478, at 10 past 5 saw a horse and cart with no lights going down Victoria Road, called to the horse to stop which it did. Miss JORDAN got up into the cart and took charge of horse and took to Police Station where PC 525 CLAYDON arrested man and took him inside; name George MILBOURNE 33 Cromer Rd age 26 years

Saturday 30th November 1918....went and saw Mrs JANE landlady of Fox & Hounds about a ladies lavatory as there were complaints of individuals using back entrance

Thursday 5th December 1918...attended 11 Lower Richmond Street to see parents of James EDWARDS who was brought into Police station on Dec 5th 1.45 by Sergt EVERARD who found him asleep under arch of Midland Railway. Age 11 years.

(Under the entry she adds)was sent to Chelmsford Industrial School 9th January 1919, also Charles BROOKER.

Monday January 13th 1919...evening, took a woman home to 9 Archers Cottages, Rush Green, name Emma BORHAM charged with being drunk and incapable. Patrolled South Street Railways Stations

January 17th 1919 keep a look out for a boy named James EDWARDS age 11 who had escaped from the Detention Home at West Ham at 8 am.

Thursday 23rd January 1919.... sent to Workhouse to verify a letter of Private BOWMAN of 22 Margaret Rd Romford who had applied for his discharge on compassionate grounds. Found it correct

Just five days after the Great War ended the Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police sent the following letter to the National Union of Women Workers.

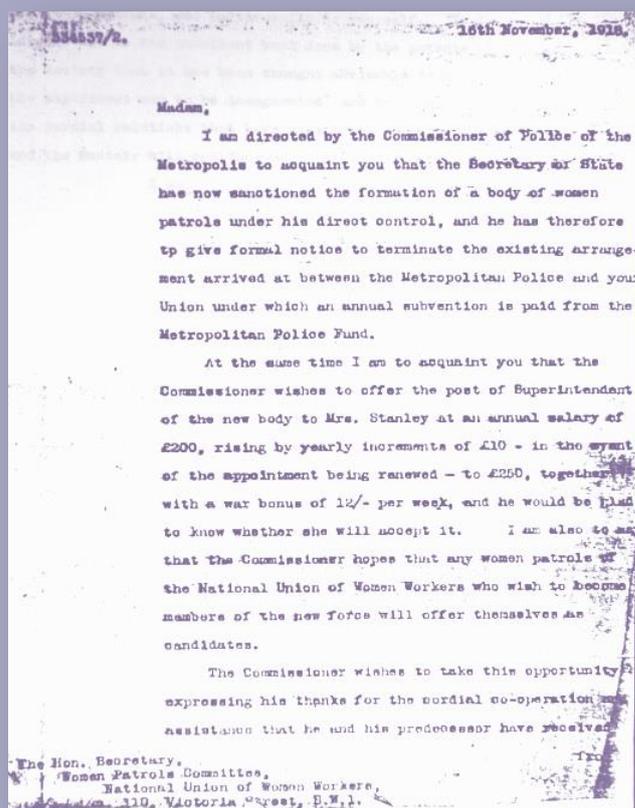
Many women lost their jobs to those men returning from the front line. Alice seems to have continued her work at Romford at least into 1919.

It must have been difficult for Alice to have been accepted by her male counterparts due to the attitude prevailing at that time and she would have been expected to look after her family too.

She clearly was a very determined, hardworking lady. She died in 1966, aged 91 years.

A granddaughter of Alice Maud WILSON recalls;

“From memory, she had six children, was a member of the Women's Suffrage movement, a lifelong member of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service for which I have her Long Service medal. The story goes that she sewed shirts in the Depression and fed the Jarrow Marchers on their way through Romford. She was very involved with the Women's Co-operative Movement and in later years, the National Federation of Old Age Pensioners. She died in Abbeyfields home in Canvey Island where she was a resident after having being on the Board of Governors for some years. I remember her with great affection and regard her as an inspiration.



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