

Bagnigge Wells Police Station and the “Fantastic PC Fox”

By FRED FEATHER

I suppose that it was my good friend and fellow Rotarian, the late Major Idwal Evans of the Salvation Army, who set off this chain of events. He asked me if I would go to Abney Park Cemetery in Stoke Newington, East London, to photograph the gravestones of William Booth and other celebrities of “The Salvation Army.” My father had often told me that, as a child of about 6, he had watched the funeral procession of General Booth passing Dalston. He added that, in the cemetery, one of the seven famous Victorian burial grounds in London, was “A Quaker buried in a four poster bed.” I soon located the former, but not the latter.

Whilst wandering around what is now an overgrown, heavily forested park, I came upon a Metropolitan Police monument of great interest to me. Below a Masonic symbol it read as follows:

Joseph Joyce aged 42 years, late Sergeant of the Criminal investigation Department, “J” Division, who lost his life whilst arresting a thief at Charing Cross Road on 20th June 1892 and although mortally wounded by two revolver shots he gallantly struggled with his prisoner until assistance arrived. Erected by his comrades.

Below that was the details of his wife’s death. I took a photograph and included it in a Family History lecture, extolling it as a prime example of the information that graves can often give, including his Masonic



The unveiling of the memorial to Sir Richard Mayne

hobby. Then I received a message from Matthew Pridham, an excellent speaker and member of the Friends of the Kensal Green Cemetery. He told me that the prominent obelisk to Sir Richard Mayne (the first Joint Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police) in that famous cemetery was in need of some attention. I passed this on to the Friends of the Metropolitan Police, but thought “I must go there someday!” Under pressure from the person in charge of this marriage I agreed that we would visit all of London’s “Magnificent Seven”.

Abney Park was the first call, and we joined the crowds of people wandering round the beautiful afforested place, with babies in prams, children on little bicycles and families relaxing. In the middle of this vast area we came upon a noisy group of men with two

Metropolitan policemen apparently keeping order. In my ninth decade my instinct was to “black my nose”, as I thought “I might be a useful witness.” But it was not trouble, for they were all laughing and joking. We waited until things died down, then I asked the apparently senior of the officers, “Could you direct me to a particular police grave?” “Certainly,” he said, and led us through a maze to an imposing memorial featuring a helmet. It was not the one I wanted, but I had heard the story (at a Police History Society Conference at Aldermaston) of the Tottenham Outrage of 1909.

I explained it was another stone that I was seeking and he asked my interest. I explained my hobby of family history and that I was the Treasurer of the Essex Police Memorial Trust, a charity which looks after graves of that county’s losses from violence. The officer, whose name was Clifford, had a strong Dublin accent and told me that he was Constable Fox of Stoke Newington Police.

A few days later I had a call from him. He told me that, according to the cemetery authority, there were six such graves in Abney Park and he had located five of them. He was putting together a project to find the sixth. His next call told us that, with the aid of local youth and advice from Keith Foster of the National Police Memorial group, he had found the grave of Constable Richard Lillicrap, who had died in 1862 whilst chasing a thief. We

thought to help him with research on the life of that officer and soon came up with his marriage in 1855 as well as the following newspaper cutting from the *Halesworth Times and East Suffolk Advertiser*.

PUBLIC FUNERAL OF A POLICE OFFICER.—Yesterday afternoon the funeral of Richard Lillcrap, No. 409 of the A reserve, and lately one of the superintendants of the G division, who recently died suddenly on duty, while in pursuit of a thief in Petticoat-lane took place at half-past two o'clock, accompanied by some rather unusual demonstrations of sympathy on the part of the police force. The funeral procession was formed in Merlin's-place, Wilmington-square, Clerkenwell, where the deceased resided and consisted of a hearse and one carriage containing his widow and relatives, followed, in marching order, by upwards of 200 of the G and H divisions, and accompanied by no fewer than six superintendants. The police band of the district marched in front, playing the "Dead march" in *Son.* At Islington and Kingsland the procession was joined by some hundreds more belonging to the police corps of the district, and, on arriving at the Abney Park Cemetery, the remains were interred with the usual solemnities. The deceased had been fourteen years in the force, and the demonstration of yesterday was a true test of the appreciation in which he was held.

We were astonished when we found that Lillcrap, at the time of his marriage, was living at Bagnigge Wells Police Station. This is pronounced Bag-Nidge. A census confirmed that in 1861 there were some 20 constables stationed there, including a Matthew Fox from Dublin. Apparently the chalybeate water at that place, circa 1750, was considered very healthy (Sadlers Wells is not far away) and society went there to drink it for their health. According to the internet it rivalled Vauxhall as a recreational spot. Apparently, from about the mid-19th century the name disappeared and the police station was renamed Kings Cross Road Police Station.

We then arranged to meet Clifford and Keith at the cemetery and there located the Lillcrap grave, which perhaps had never had a headstone. Constable Fox met many people in the cemetery who acknowledged him, and a number of junior school aged children called to him.

Next we went for coffee and he was just as well known in Stoke Newington High Street. "It is my name," he said, "they know "The Fantastic Mr Fox" from television, so I sometimes get

called The Fantastic PC Fox." I later heard that Constable Fox and his Borough Commander were seeking to mark the grave with a headstone.

Right! A job done! It was a pleasure for me to see a beat being worked in the traditional way and the public seemed to approve.

Another visit to Kensal Green was on the cards. But, on that same day we walked along Kings Cross Road and, opposite the Police Station, on the wall of Number 61, we found this plaque. Apparently Bagnigge House was once the home of Charles II's mistress Nell Gwyn. The Pindar of Wakefield thereon referred to an 1680 public house, and not to the CID Training School "Bishopsgarth" at Wakefield that some of us attended. Result!

In Kensal Green, with a Matthew Pridham map, we soon located the memorial to the Met Commissioner. If I lived in London and had got a pair of garden croppers with me I could have cut down some intrusive saplings around it and smartened it up. But, make a journey 50 miles each way to do so?

We also learned that in a nearby

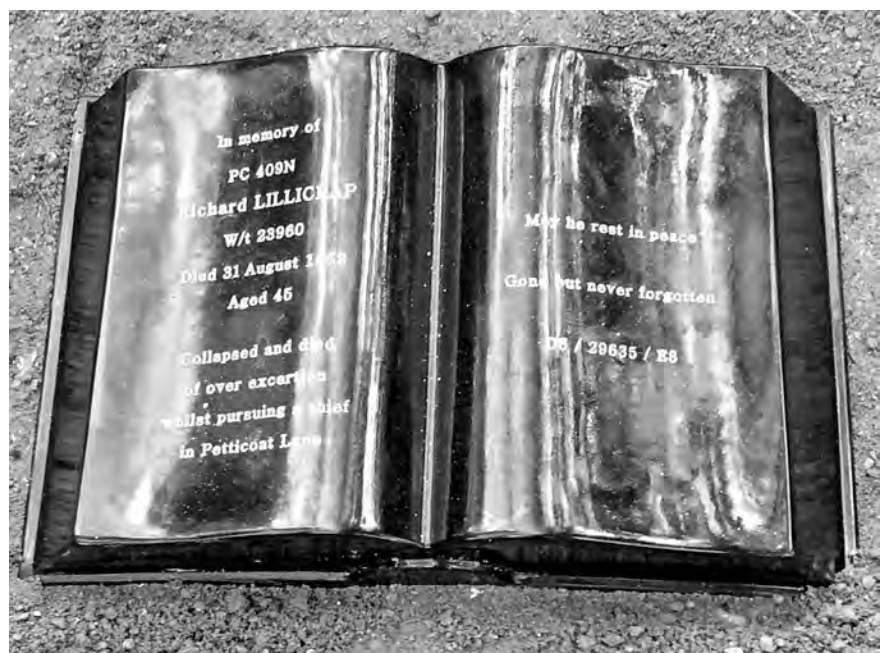
catacomb was the resting place of the other Joint Commissioner, Sir Charles Rowan (1782-1852). We finally went for a celebratory meal and the nice restaurant, in a good mood, gave us a free bottle of splendid red wine. Altogether a good day!

"...for there is good news to be heard and fine things to be seen, before we go to Paradise, by way of Kensal Green" – G. K. Chesterton.

We were then informed that the Stoke Newington officers had obtained a headstone for Constable Lillcrap and on Monday 18th December 2017 this was consecrated.



FRED FEATHER served with Saint Albans City, Southend-on-Sea Constabulary and Essex Police between 1957 and 1988. He was Force Public Relations Officer for Essex Police (1990-1998) and founding Curator of the Essex Police Museum. Fred was Editor of the family history magazine the *Essex Family Historian* from 2002 to 2016, acting as Chairman of the Essex Society for Family History and is now a Vice President.



The new headstone for Constable Richard Lillcrap