

MY FIRST DAY AT DAMERHAM

George Bowers

My marriage in 1951 to June my wife triggered my posting to the Damerham

Beat, as the Police Authority had to supply us with a house. At that time war conditions still prevailed and we could only buy specially built "Beautility" furniture with docketts. All furniture was in short supply and was difficult to obtain.

On 25 February 1953, with our few articles of second-hand furniture we set out in a removal van from Gosport to Damerham, where we were to start up in our first home. Our newly purchased furniture was to arrive four days later. We saw no one in our drive through the village and West Park Lane. The newly built Police house stood isolated, the bungalows now either side of it had not been built.

After settling in with our few sticks of furniture I decided to have a walk around the village. It was midday so I headed to the Compass Hotel, I saw no one, it was like a ghost town. I entered the Compass's expecting to meet somebody, it was empty, gloomy and basic. I called out, but no one came. I then searched all through the public house and could find no one. By this time I was starting to think I would be investigating my first crime. I finally went outside and shouted. From the stables at the rear of the Pub, a figure appeared wearing riding breeches. This I found to be Mr Hockey, Landlord and

Huntsman. I introduced myself whilst he drew me a pint of bitter straight from the cask. He then excused himself saying he had to see to his horses. I finished my pint and left. I then called in at the local shop next door, now a private house, where I met "Herbie" Nicklen. Here was my first villager who I found both friendly and cheerful and remained so during all my years at Damerham. I left with my knowledge of Damerham greatly increased.

During that first evening there was a knock on the door and I found myself being formally introduced to Mrs Hibberd, Justice of the Peace, by her chauffeur. On entering our sparsely furnished room this small, bird like elderly lady refused the comfort of our only easy chair and insisted on an upright chair. She then officially welcomed my wife and I to Damerham and sat chatting for some time. During our conversation I became aware that this lady had gentle charm and wit. She served in various committees and was also an official Prison Visitor. As my first day at Damerham came to a close, I tried to imagine the looks on the faces of some of the hardened criminals when this little eccentric looking lady asked about their welfare.

A few months later when I made my first attendance at the Magistrates Court at Fordingbridge. Mrs Hibberd was serving on the bench. As I started to give my evidence I caught her eye, she smiled sweetly at me and discreetly waggled her fingers in recognition. This caused me to lose concentration and my mind went blank. As I struggled to regain composure I could hear myself saying "I am PC 281 Bowers, stationed at Damerham", pronouncing it Dam Mer Ham, and not in the

local way. This caused a few stifled laughs from the public, this was not one of my good days!

EARLY DAYS ON THE BEAT

The Damerham beat came under the Fordingbridge Section of the New Forest Division. Patrolling the Damerham beat as a 25 year old Police Constable was by foot or bicycle. My bicycle was a Rudge, 24inch frame with 28 x 1 1/2 inch wheels and Sturmey Archer 4 speed gears. My uniform was the old style, with the jacket and overcoat buttoned up to the neck. The uniform cape was used with leggings in wet weather. Collars and ties came later in my service. The only Police vehicle was a Ford Popular kept at Fordingbridge Police Station and I was never allowed to drive it. The only Police radios in the Fordingbridge section were in that vehicle and the Police Station.

Because we had no personal radios, we had to use telephone kiosks as fixed points of contact. A changing rota was used for security reasons. Hours of working were 8 hours, but on a changing rota of 4 hours on, 4 hours off, 4 hours on, starting at anytime of the day or night. This locked you into a 12 hour day. Rarely did you get a straight 8 hours. It was no fun starting at 4am in the winter. This system soon changed to more civilized hours.

A country beat Constables duties, included acting as a Diseases of Animals Inspector. A Coroners Officer in the case of sudden death where a death certificate could not be issued by a doctor and, an Aliens Officer, where visitors from a foreign country had to be registered and checked regularly. All dog licences were

checked yearly. All these duties are now carried out by specialist people.

As a Disease of Animals Inspector I was involved in my first case of Anthrax, a steer had died of the disease at Manor Farm, Rockbourne. This disease can transmit to humans. In those days you had to dig a large pit, by any means, even by hand if necessary. The pit's angle to the wind was critical because when you lit the fire the draught had to funnel through. When the fire was burning strongly, a grating or an old iron farm gate or similar thing was placed over the pit. The dead animal had to be kept close to the pit in order to roll it onto the grating where it was cremated, a two day job at least. This was a dirty, smelly and dangerous job. Health and Safety Regulations in those days did not exist.

Another job that came under the Diseases of Animals Inspection, was the overseeing of sheep dipping. This was a yearly job when all sheep had to be cleansed of sheep scab, etc. No matter how far you stood away from the actual dipping your uniform always smelt of disinfectant.

In the winters of the late 1950's we had very heavy falls of snow. Traffic came to a standstill and riding a pedal cycle on the beat became very tricky indeed. One particular year when snow drifts were hedge high, I pointed this fact out to my sergeant. He told me to walk my beat. One morning I trudged through the snow to Martin Village and back, and in the afternoon to Rockbourne and back, via Sandleheath. I was a very tired person who went to bed that night. I did this for three days until the snow melted sufficiently to ride my bicycle. To make sure I did as he instructed

my sergeant rang me on the telephone conference points (telephone boxes) at each village at times arranged by him.

During these early years at Damerham gypsies still travelled the drove roads, occasionally causing trouble and so had to be moved on. Within a few years this stopped when the gypsies became motorised. No longer did they have the excuse not to move, such as "me oss has thrown a shoe sir "or "me wheel on the van is broke".

In this same period of time Bert Dibden of Martin was still operating steam traction engines to pull his threshing machine. These wonderful machines were being superseded by heavy tractors such as the Field Marshall, used by Steve Poore also from Martin. I can still visualise Steve's broad grin as he manoeuvred past you in the narrow lanes with his large threshing machine. Steve later changed with the times and purchased a Claus combine harvester, for use in contract threshing.

The affects of the war gradually receded and farming prospered in the area. Some important and historical events took place during my days at Damerham. We only got to hear about them by newspaper or radio, we had no television. The following events spring to mind, Stalin of Russia dying, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbing Mount Everest, Queen Elizabeth's coronation, John Reginald Christie hanged at Pentonville Prison, finally my hero Roger Bannister breaking the four minute mile. There were many more.

THE NIGHT INTRUDER

The garden area at the newly built Police house was originally a field and a lot of work had to

be done getting it back into production. Vegetables were a necessity as my pay was poor. After the first year I prepared the ground at the front of the house to lay a lawn. This was how I occupied my 4 hours off duty in between shifts.

I finally sowed the lawn and was particularly proud that it was nice and level. The following morning when I looked out of the window at my newly laid lawn it was covered with hoof prints, obviously caused by a horse. It added insult to injury by having rolled over it, then when leaving left its mark all along the drive. There was no sign of the animal - Maybe for the best.

My initial suspicion that it was local lads playing a joke on their new policeman evaporated when I later discovered the horse was owned by Budgie Jerrard of Crossways Farm, which had escaped overnight.

POLICE HOUSE PLOT BLUNDER

One day surveyors from Hampshire County Council came to measure up the vacant plot between the Police House and the semi-detached council houses in West Park Lane. This was prior to building further council houses. After a while with embarrassment and much tramping over my garden they concluded that my Police House had been built too close to the other council houses. This eventually resulted in four bungalows being built instead of semi-detached houses. To offset the loss of living accommodation two other bungalows were built on the opposite side of the Police House. It had been planned that the Police House was to be the end house.

The final twist to this story came when one day I found out by accident that the Police House was built in the wrong place anyway. The chosen site of several years previously had been pegged out on council allotments. When I viewed the site the pegs were over-planted with brussels sprouts, cabbages and root vegetables, by some industrious allotment holder.

Hampshire County Council surveyor's department at Winchester were informed, and eventually two council bungalows were built on the site, which are known as No's 1 & 2 High Street, Damerham.

NEW BABY SCARES PC

The open space between the semi-detached council houses in West Park Lane and the Police House was finally filled with bungalows. The bungalow next to the Police house was occupied by Jim and Joyce Dyer. Joyce was expecting a child.

On the day Joyce's baby started to arrive, her mother who lived in the village and who I thought was going to cope with the home birth panicked when she could not contact the midwife. When my wife was asked by Mrs Dyer to assist her daughter her face showed nervousness and pleaded she had no experience of delivering babies. When they both turned to me I struggled to disguise my panic but in the true spirit of the Force reluctantly went to see Joyce. I suggested she should prepare herself for the birth by undressing. In order to cover my embarrassment I returned to the Police house and tried to contact the midwife with no success. I then rushed back to Joyce who by then was experiencing contractions. I stood there steeling myself to do the necessary and

trying to recall what little instruction I had been given in my first aid classes. In desperation I ran back to my office and telephoned the midwife again, with luck I contacted her.

On returning I found Joyce's mother had overcome her initial panic and had helped Joyce bring her baby Paul into the world.

OLYMPIC SPRINT CYCLIST

I had always been keen on football and played for many teams. During one week I played football for the Hampshire County Police Team and the New Forest Police Divisional Team and finally on Saturday for the Fordingbridge Turks.

I had to sandwich my Police duties between these games. The evening after the Fordingbridge game I was called in to do duty at Fordingbridge Police Station. When I finished duty at 2am Sunday morning the hectic schedule of that week was starting to take effect. I was so tired and not looking forward to cycling back home to Damerham. I struggled up the hill from the railway station bridge and free wheeled down the other side towards Sandleheath, practically asleep on my bicycle. I entered the area opposite St Aldems Church with its overhanging trees and gloomy interior. Passing the closed ornamental gates which sealed off the road to Sandlemanor School, I was aroused out of my stupor by the sight of a tall unearthly looking creature moving above the gates. At the same time a terrible noise came from it. Now I was no Olympic Sprint Cyclist, but I bet I broke the record. I had cycled 100 yards before I realised it was not "Old Nick" but a Peacock. My adrenaline was running so hard I had no

further problem keeping awake or cycling home. In the coming years I was always on the alert when passing that same spot.

BIRD LIFE

Bird life on the beat was always plentiful. There are two memories which stand out. During a certain time of the year my wife and I were given pleasure by the acrobatic display of about a dozen lapwings (Peewits) which came flying over the field at the rear of the Police house. In perfect formation and in unison they would perform the most appealing display of wheeling and diving. After about eight minutes in the same orderly fashion would fly off out of the field. They reappeared each evening for about two weeks.

Our other pleasure was watching the buzzards flying at Blagdon Gap on Martin Down. There were three pairs nesting in that area when we first visited, but within a couple of years they had all disappeared.

A further encounter with birds was not nice but still spectacular. As the winter evenings drew in, Damerham and district was invaded by millions of starlings from all directions. When they all joined together they were like large black clouds. After feverishly swirling about they would settle en masse in the wild rhododendrons on the West Park Estate. When I was on night duty and cycling along the road from Rockbourne to Sandleheath you could hear them all twittering away to one another. Their droppings had coated all the bushes and would have done the same to any washing foolishly left out on the line.

CALF BEING BORN

On a date I am unable to remember but in the very early hours of a summer's day when returning from patrolling Martin Village. I saw a light shining in the buildings of South Allenford Farm, Damerham. As this was unusual I investigated. I found Mr Densham, the farmer, struggling to bring a calf into the world. The calf was lying awkward and was having difficulty being born. It was at a critical point so it was off jacket, up sleeves. I pulled as Mr Densham moved and guided the calf so it could be born. We delivered the calf, which was a heifer, just in time for the Vet to check it over and pronounce her healthy. I returned home in time to get some sleep. My wife was not particularly happy about having the house scented by the smell of cows from my uniform, but forgave me when I explained what had happened.

THE ROUNDUP

Before cattle grids were placed on all roads leading out from the New Forest, ponies strayed as far as Damerham. Many times when cycling to Fordingbridge I would herd several ponies at a time back to Fordingbridge and on to Forest land.

There was one particular time when I managed to get several ponies

with an awkward one amongst them back to Fordingbridge High Street. In those days there was a small barber shop halfway down the High Street, and on this day its door was wide open. At this point the awkward pony tried to double back and I cut him off, but instead of joining the other ponies he ran into the Barbers shop. I never did know what happened in there, but the pony must have been a miracle maker. An elderly gentleman whom I used to

see quite regularly walking with two sticks in a laborious and exaggerated way came flying out of the shop waving his arms in the air followed by the pony. He was still wearing the barber's cloth around his neck, and his language was quite colourful.

I did not have to herd the ponies down the street, he did it for me. It was not until he had gone about a hundred yards that he realised what he was doing and came walking back unaided without his walking sticks. Had I witnessed a miracle, by then I had faded into the background.

MYXOMATOSIS

In my early years at Damerham the myxomatosis virus was not in evidence, but it soon became prevalent. The gamekeeping fraternity assisting its spread, as an easy way to get rid of the rabbit population. I was never happy with using a virus as a way of dealing with the over population of these animals. I found it a distressing disease and I hated to see the suffering it caused.

One spring morning I started work at 6am and was making my way to Martin Village when I found many rabbits sitting at the side of the road all suffering from the virus. The further I went the more rabbits I saw, about 50 all told.

Over the years the virus killed off most of the rabbit population. Now, 40 years on, the rabbit has overcome the disease and are breeding. In some areas of the country they have once again become a pest. I hope some more humane way to control them can be found.

Prior to the introduction of the disease, rabbits made a cheap and wholesome meal. But now,

the thought of their diseased bodies has put me off rabbit for life.

THE PRIMITIVE CHAPEL

There were times when I was picked up at my Police house by the patrol car from Lyndhurst, a Wolseley 6/80, to patrol the whole of the New Forest Division. The patrol of my beat came first.

Whilst driving through Martin village the driver pulled my leg about the isolation of the area and questioned what I did as a Policeman. He said the area was so isolated that even the village had a "Primitive" Chapel referring to the Methodist Primitive Chapel. To get one over on him I jokingly told him that I knew everything about the area, and even where every bird roosted at night. Of course he challenged me on that statement. We were passing through Tidpit at the time heading for Damerham. To prove my point I instructed the driver to slow down and stop outside North Allenford farm gate that was overhung by trees. I then shone my torch onto a pheasant perched on a branch.

Being a town person he was very surprised. He didn't know the roosting habits of pheasants as I did and some other knowledgeable villagers with catapults and low calibre shotguns.

IRA

On Saturday 13th August 1955, I had just finished my eight hours of duty when I received a telephone call from Fordingbridge Police Station to make myself immediately available. The reason, an armed IRA gang had broken into the Aborfield Barracks Armoury in Berkshire, and stolen weapons and

ammunition. I was to be collected, and with three other constables taken to Martin Drove End to set up a road block.

Arriving at Martin Drove End - now the busy main Salisbury Road (A354) we set about constructing the road block. The main part consisted of an antiquated four wheel hay wagon we confiscated from a nearby farm, and placed at an angle across the road. We parked the Police vehicle opposite to form a chicane.

We then mounted guard, with our only link to the outside world the Police car radio. During the hours, all four of us wondered what we should do if the gang come upon our makeshift barrier. Jokingly, it was suggested that it would confuse them, making them think there had been an accident between a farm cart and a police vehicle and maybe slowed or even stopped. How would we have arrested them, who knows? as we were all unarmed.

In the early morning we got the order to stand down. Needless to say the armed IRA gang did not show up or anyone else for that matter!! It is far cry from today with armed Police Response Teams with vehicle stopping "Stinger" equipment and personal communications.

A day later we found out that the IRA although successful in their raid, were too successful.

They had stolen so much they overloaded their lorry. Whilst this vehicle was struggling along the High Street of Bracknell, Berkshire, it drew the attention of a Beat Policeman who stopped the vehicle. As it came to rest the men all jumped out and escaped. All the stolen arms and ammunition were recovered.

ROSE AND THISTLE, ROCKBOURNE

Crime and violence by local people were rare on the Damerham beat. So it was a surprise that on a summer's evening I was contacted by Fordingbridge Police Station at the Compass's public house. I was informed by PC "Captain" Kidd that some local youths were causing trouble in the Rose and Thistle public house at Rockbourne and would I attend. Although officially off duty, as a beat officer it was not expected that you would refuse. On route I stopped off at my Police house changed into uniform and as an after thought slipped my truncheon into its pocket. I then cycled to the public house.

On entering the public bar where I expected the trouble, the locals all smiled and pointed me to the lounge bar. There I discovered three men apparently drunk and had thrown champagne about and abused Mr Greenwood the landlord.

Whilst trying diplomatically to get these men outside and quietly disperse them, the larger of the two men attacked me. The other two then joined in, I had two down with one to go when I was grasped from behind by an unknown forth member of the group, and things started to look ugly. It was then I heard someone shout "George is in trouble" and all the local lads piled in. The trouble makers were ejected out onto the front lawn and where they were encircled by the local lads and customers. As they stood waiting for me to arrest them, goodness knows how, the men attacked me again. To slow them down a few whacks with the truncheon on the elbows and knees helped. In that brief moment I asked if anybody had phoned for assistance, no one had, not even Mr Greenwood, so I had to break off and phone myself - no personal radios or C.S. Gas in

those days. In the meantime the men had made off, but were arrested by the Police crew coming to my assistance.

In time all four were convicted. They were bookmakers and that day had attended the Salisbury Races. Whilst I was being attacked by three of the men on the front lawn, the forth, a big man in a mohair jumper which made him look huge was challenging the surrounding crowd. He was crouching, shrugging his shoulders and saying "Come on who wants to be thrown".

In the weeks following, and when in uniform and on patrol, I forgave these law abiding locals who had come to my rescue when they crouched on my approach and hunched their shoulders and cheekily? growled "Do you want to be thrown George?" Thanks again lads.

BEATING FOR GAME

The Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) experimental game farm covered most of Damerham area. There was always the demand for men to act as beaters on game shoots.

Many times I joined in with the group of beaters. It was a good day out. However, wading through chest high wet kale after rain was not so good. I remember one occasion when Freddie Gregory, a small man, from Damerham was wading through such a tall crop he could not be seen. The call "where are you Fred?" was answered by him poking his stick up through the kale. He was then guided by shouting of directions until he came out at the end of the field looking like a drowned rat. Head gamekeeper Bert Ambrose had great

difficulty restraining the resulting good-natured banter.

FOOT AND MOUTH

One of the duties of a country beat Constable was to act as a Disease of Animals Inspector, and which is now under taken by the County Council. This required you to check the transport movements of animals, for example, cattle, sheep and pigs. This was done on a regular basis when you visited farms and small holdings. By law the farmers had to keep an official register. This was in case of an outbreak of a notifiable disease. The register allowed the movement of all animals to be traced.

In the mid 1950's there was a serious outbreak of the Foot and Mouth disease which affected large areas of Wiltshire. One evening I received a telephone call notifying me that a case of Foot and Mouth had been confirmed at Tenantry Farm, Rockbourne. This meant the closure of the farm to people and vehicles, in order to stop the spread of this disease.

Notices had to be displayed. The main entrance to the farm had to be manned for 24 hours a day, with strict rules of disinfecting peoples footwear and vehicle wheels to be supervised.

My first 12 hour overnight shift on the farm entrance was pretty rugged. No shelter, just a hedge to break the wind. The following day a night watchman's hut was delivered for our use and a brazier.

On the morning of the third day I arrived to relieve my colleague and found him in a bad way. He had forgotten that the fumes from the coke brazier were toxic and the wind had blown the fumes into the hut. He was off sick

for a while. Eventually an old caravan replaced the watchman's hut which made life more endurable.

The prize winning herd was finally slaughtered and buried in a hole excavated by a digger.

The last to go were the heifers, amongst these were those earmarked by the farm manager as show animals, a culmination of many years of breeding. I shall never forget the misery on that mans face as they were herded to their destruction.

That evening he joined me in the caravan where we talked late into the night. He told me of all the plans he had for the prize winning herd and his expectations at future shows.

Although he was the farm manager he talked of the herd as his own and not of the person that owned it. I am sure our talk eased his pain, but the bottle of whisky he shared with me blunted most of his misery. It certainly helped me to finish my uncomfortable night's vigil.

FLOWER SHOW

The Damerham Flower Show was always a major event in the village and was attended by people from the surrounding area. The main show piece was the marquee that held the flower show exhibits. I did not enter any exhibits the first year but as I developed my garden I started with showing vegetables, then as the years progressed I started to exhibit dahlias with some success. Then the friendly rivalry grew with other local men. This helped to revive flagging interest.

One year the show committee became ambitious and enlarged the show to include an athletic track. I entered to run in several events and this, I think, encouraged the local lads to

beat me. Another event was the greasy pole this again gave the local lads a chance to wallop hell out of their local copper. I well remember Ken Sims, Budgie Jerrard and Cyril Hooper as the hardest hitters. One or the other used to win the event each year.

One year my sergeant insisted that I should be officially on duty and patrol the showground. Prior to this some of the local lads who were good runners were slightly peaked by my winning races and were intent on beating me. This was all friendly and I must admit I did stir them up a little. So I could not back out competing even if I was on duty. So on the day of the show I paraded for duty with my uniform over my running gear.

My sergeant was due to visit so I would not be able to take part until he had left the show. I waited but he did not turn up. The race was close, so I dived behind the show tent and stripped to my running gear. I had just put on my running shoes and my sergeant arrived. I frantically changed back into uniform. As I escorted my sergeant around the stalls and show tent I wondered if he noticed that I was wearing my spiked running shoes. The Organiser of Races could see my predicament and delayed the race. When my sergeant had left I quickly stripped to my running gear and took part in the race. What ever the local lad's plan was too nobble me did not work, I won the race. Another memory of friendly rivalry and good clean fun.

THE FLYING VISIT

During the early days of my service, all country beat officers were subjected to many yearly and monthly inspections by senior officers. Inspection of rooms in the house for

decoration and also the exterior. Your uniform for renewal, office records and pocket books. Now, most of these intrusions into your privacy do not exist today.

Discipline was harsh and many senior officers ruled by fear rather than leadership. My stint in the Coldstream Guards just before the end of the last war had hardened me to this type of treatment.

One of these inspections to the Police house stands out in my mind. My superintendent from Lyndhurst notified me that he was on his way to visit. It was prudent that I made sure all office records were in good order. My houseproud wife went into a frenzy of cleaning and polishing. The whole ground floor of the house was covered with Marley tiles and by the time my wife had finished they had a mirror like finish.

As my superintendent walked up the drive to my office, I opened the front door and greeted him. He came bustling in and to my shock horror he went flying past me arms flailing and crashed heavily into the communication door to my private quarters. Standing speechless I realised my wife had polished beneath the door mat, and when the superintendent stepped on the mat it acted as a ski sending him along the corridor. None of the apologies I made reduced the strictest inspection I had ever received.

Although I made sure the mat would not move again I noticed that this superintendent always came into our house with great caution.

THE SHELL HEAD

On a Sunday evening I had to perform town beat duty at Fordingbridge. When in the area near the church of St Mary the Virgin, I was

approached by an elderly gentleman. He told me of a young boy was playing with the top of an artillery shell, as used in the Great War which was dangerous. He was an ex artillery gunner and had used the same type of shell in that war. I took what he told me seriously and searched and found the boy still playing with the shell. Together we went to his home. On questioning his mother as to how they had come by the shell head, she said it had been brought home from the war by her father as a souvenir. It had remained on the mantle piece over the fire for many years and the children had occasionally played with it. I took possession of the shell head telling the mother that I would get someone from the Military Bomb Squad to check it for safety. Being a Sunday, and the shell head not posing a threat for so many years I did not telephone the Bomb Squad. I attached a note to the shell and placed it in one of the two cells that we used for storing files and locked it in.

At the end of my shift at 2am I cycled home to Damerham with the firm intention of telephoning the Bomb Squad later the same morning. I was just waking up when I received a telephone call from a very irate sergeant. It appears that on seeing the shell head with my note he had phoned the Bomb Squad. On arrival and after examination the Officer of the Bomb Squad was very reluctant to remove the shell head because he considered it too dangerous. Eventually all personnel from the Police Station, people living near by and children from the playschool next door were evacuated. All traffic was stopped as the officer gingerly carried the shell head to a field nearby, now Flaxfield End Road, where it was blown up. It made a rather large hole. The

main reason my sergeant was irate was because as a resident officer he had been sleeping above where I had stored the shell head.

LEAVING DAMERHAM

In March 1960 I was notified that I was being transferred from the Damerham beat to Farnborough in the Aldershot Division. It was to be a straight exchange.

Prior to the removal, the exchange constable and his wife came to view the Police house and the beat area. We showed them around the house and whilst the wives visited the school I took my colleague on a tour of the beat. This consisted of the villages of Damerham, Martin, Rockbourne and Sandheath. We finished our tour at Tidpit the site of the old Police House. I then took my colleague to the hill on Martin Down near the site of the ICI Game Farm Weather Station (now removed). From this vantage point it was easier to show him the boundaries of the beat. These coincided with the county boundaries of Wiltshire and Dorset. I pointed out Fordingbridge in the distance that was the far end of the beat. All I could think of was how beautiful it all was, and was angry about having to leave.

After a while I turned to my colleague and asked him what he thought about the area. He answered "Its too bloody rural George". You could tell by his voice he had no appreciation of the area and had no wish to come to the Damerham beat. This highlighted the difference between us, he was a town person whilst I was country born. I never did find out how he managed to get out of the posting, but he stayed in Farnborough the rest of his career. Eventually, my next replacement was PC Peter

Kemp and I know that he enjoyed his years at Damerham, as I did.

So came the day we had to move. With all our worldly goods packed in the furniture lorry.

My wife two children and I clambered up into the cab of the lorry. We still had not sufficient money to own our own transport. As we left our neighbours waved us goodbye and as we went past the cottages opposite the Compass's another group of people waved us on our way. We left with a heavy heart, but the memory of these people have lasted.

During my 30 years in the force I served in Gosport, Damerham, Farnborough, Rowlands Castle, Hayling Island, Andover and finally Petersfield where I retired from the service. In all of these other places I served, my wife and I have never recaptured the happiness and friendship that we experienced at Damerham. It was this that has drawn us back many times.

IAN AND PAUL

One of the saddest memories of Damerham was the death of Ian Penny. Ian was a tall well-built youth, who lived at West Park Lane, and worked on a farm. He rode a motorcycle and like a lot of the local youths used the Compasses Hotel as a club as there was little else to do in the village.

One evening I was sitting in the Compasses talking to the locals when Ian came in, bought a drink and sat down alongside me. Later in conversation I discovered he was dissatisfied with working on a farm and wanted a change. I urged him to join the Police Force. He doubted that his educational standard would qualify him for entry into the Police. Because his situation mirrored my own when I was

working on a farm I explained "They took me, you should have no trouble".

To encourage him and not to embarrass him I loaned him a pile of Police Review magazines. In each, there was a page of mathematical examination test papers for promotion to Sergeant. I advised him to try and complete the tests, and from which, he would be able to assess his capabilities. It was to my delight that this and other encouragement eventually led to him becoming a Police Constable and before his death a Police Sergeant.

Another young man from the village, Paul Nicklen, who was mad about cricket, approached me one day when I was making a contact point at the telephone box near the bus shelter at Damerham, which was also used as a meeting place for all ages. Paul wanted to know all about the Police Force. Whilst we chatted he said he was going to join the Police when he was old enough. Some youths do romance about such things, but I had no doubt that he would achieve his ambition. He did, finally reaching a senior rank in the Hampshire Constabulary.

Although the paths of Ian, Paul and myself only crossed briefly during my service I followed their careers with interest.

On reflection, as they finally achieved a higher rank than me it was a good job I did not clip them around the ear for any wrong doings when they were younger.

REFLECTIONS OF A COUNTRY BEAT POLICE OFFICER

Peter A.V. Kemp

In March, 1960, I received a notice of transfer from my then station, Fareham, to Damerham. "P.C. Kemp will transfer to Damerham on Friday, 8th. April, 1960, replacing the present resident officer, P.C. George Bowers"

My wife, Edna, and I were utterly oblivious to the whereabouts or even the existence of Damerham. However, we knew it would be a country beat posting. Much sought after in those days. We had not risen to the dizzy heights of owning any mechanical transport so friends volunteered to drive us to Damerham with our three young children, Timothy, Beverley and Morgan, to view the police house in West Park Lane. After much map searching we pinpointed that the village stood on the borders with Dorset and Wiltshire.

Both Edna and I originate from Portsmouth so one can imagine our trepidation in taking on a bucolic lifestyle. Refuse collection once a month. Bus service to Fordingbridge daily but irregular and, once a week, a coach from the village to Salisbury for a shopping expedition.

Improved advances in transport has taken place since that time. Even to the extent of the village 'copper' having more than just my pedal power to cover what, to all intents and purposes, was a very large rural area. My 'beat' consisted of Sandleheath, Rockbourne,

Damerham and Martin villages. A small slice of the A354 Salisbury to Blandford Road formed part of the beat and in the event of a serious motor vehicle accident, some 7 miles cycle ride from Damerham Police House was required of me. More often than not, Salisbury traffic cars had dealt with the incident long before my arrival.

The country air must have been doing both Edna and I the world of good as two more additions to our family arrived in September, 1960 and March 1964 in the form of Russell and Tracey, respectively!!

My predecessor, George Bowers had left the garden in excellent condition and I too, grew fond of it. Growing vegetables and dahlias. Fortunately, the land at the back of the house was owned by George Bryant and he kindly supplied the essential nutrients to make the soil very fertile.

Highlight of the year was always the Damerham Show. I was able to exert my point duty skills outside the Compasses. Highlight of the week was the trip to the village hall for the boys and I to have a sixpenny worth of haircut!!

I was always a keen sportsman and Joined both the Damerham Village cricket team, under the secretaryship of Cyril Hooper. The match was always followed by sandwiches and cakes in the Village Hall. In the winter, I played football for Martin village before moving on to play for Fordingbridge Turks and eventually captaining Ringwood Town F.C.

Beth Timothy and Beverley attended Damerham School which was headed by ~ Miss McKenzie and Miss Tiller. I paid frequent visits to give my road safety lectures. Meanwhile, Edna with, eventually, our five children to feed, kept the village grocery store healthily financed. Mr & Mrs. Ridout together with Herbie Nicklen were the mine hosts.

One of the essentials for the village policeman was to make frequent visits to the public houses in his area. I had three such premises. The Compasses at Damerham. Wally & Dot Ings were in charge. The Rose and Thistle at Rockbourne and the Coote Arms at Martin. There was also the Martin Men's Working Club.

In retrospect, I foolishly aimed for promotion and I left Damerham in February 1965 to become a sergeant at Andover. I say foolishly, because one does not realise the halcyon days the capacity as a village bobby brings. Rarely supervised. Hours were at discretion and, most of all, the involvement in all aspects of the life in the community of a village. At my eventual retirement from the Hampshire Constabulary in late 1985 as Acting Superintendent of the New Forest Sub-Division which, strangely, enough, included Damerham, found me tied to an office and heaps of paperwork in between, Edna and I had endured at least 10 house moves.

Come March next year, it will be forty years since Edna and I looked at each other and said, "Where's Damerham?" All our children are alive and well Timothy, the oldest, will be 43 years old in November. We are blessed with ten grandchildren and live quietly in New Milton. If you were in Damerham all those years ago then do not hesitate to pay us a visit.

We would be pleased to see you. Even those youngsters who may have found themselves in trouble with me for using the bus shelter as a 'necking' cache.

It was pleasing to be a guest at one our former neighbour's, Mrs. Agnes Benham, on her 100th birthday on the 11th. of this month. Her husband, Bill, a retired gamekeeper. I found his body in a nearby copse when he suffered his fatal heart attack.

A poser for those villagers from the past. Who succeeded me in 1965 as the local bobby - P.C. Nobby Matcham. He became a police superintendent too.

Finally, I was in command of the Romsey Sub-Division where a vacancy was advertised in the Force's Routine Orders. It was as the Country Beat Officer at Damerham. I recommended one of my lads, P.C. Lewis George Batty should give it a try. I told him I had enjoyed it when I was here. He did and Lew ended up as the last of the Damerham Village bobbies.

THE THIRD POLICEMAN TO SERVE AT DAMERHAM AND LIVE IN THE POLICE HOUSE 1964-68

Stuart Matcham

We served at Damerham and resided in the Village police house from 1964 to 1968, following my police service at New Milton and Ringwood. Upon being posted to the beat I did look up past crime statistic and was quite surprised to find that in 1829 two men were hanged and five transported for arson, when involved in the agrarian riots at Damerham that year. The unfortunate men had been made redundant when having previously been employed as agricultural workers residing with their large families in tied cottages, they were made suddenly superfluous to requirements by the introduction of threshing machines on farms. No other work was available and they and their families were hungry. The men were desperate and set fire to the machines.

It may also be of interest to be aware that Hampshire Constabulary had used the Damerham posting as a punishment for wrongdoing by former constables, when the police house an the beat was situated at Tidpit. Constables and their families re-located to the Tidpit police house found themselves isolated by distance from town and habitation when the

only means of travel available was an foot or by pedal cycle. The constable posted to Tidpit must have hoped that a replacement transgressor would soon be found to relieve him. I must add that I feel that the constables appointed to serve in the new Damerham Police house did not occupy the post as a punishment, indeed it was a happy time for my wife, Joy and our two young boys (now aged 41 years and 37 years).

Upon my arrival, in 1964, Peter Kemp and his family were moving out. I think that he was moving on promotion to Sergeant. I found that the beat consisted of a large area encompassing the villages of Sandleheath, Martin and Rockbourne as well as Damerham, and I was given a small monthly sum to provide myself with a pedal cycle for my duties. I recall cycling 24 miles on most days of duty to cover the area and the locations given by the supervisory sergeant at Fordingbridge where he might ring at a telephone kiosk or meet me in his shiny black Ford Popular car. This car was used only by the sergeant and was thoroughly cleaned and highly polished every Sunday morning by a constable at Fordingbridge. There were no police radios and police stations remained open all day, with most all night as well.

Landlords of the local pubs were Mr. Fishwicke (Coote Arms), Wally Ings (Compasses) and Pam and Pete Read (Rose and Thistle). Bert and Margaret Dunford ran the Post Office at Rockbourne with Bert employed in additional duties as local grave digger. Mr. and Mrs. Rideout ran the village store at Damerham and Mr. and Mrs. Wells

who became great friends ran Damerham Garage with David Herrington's help.

I clearly remember being called to a field at Damerham early one morning by a local vet. I found a large number of dead and dying pigs in the field as well as sane rather undernourished live ones. The vet suspected malnutrition and felt very strongly that the owner, who lived away from the area, had neglected the pig. I assisted him all day to catch up the remaining live pigs, some of which had to be put down. He carried out post mortems on a sample batch of five pigs, all of which had disgusting lung and intestinal worms. I worked all day and arrived home to find that my wife, unaware of my days work, had prepared pig liver for our evening meal. I just could not face it.

My duties included being appointed, after a one week course, an inspector under the Diseases of Animals Act on behalf of the local authority. My duties under the Act, included inspection on a regular basis of farm registers recording the movement of animals into and out of each of the farms on the beat. Initially when carrying out this duty late one afternoon, I attended a farm (in the Lower Daggons area where the occupant will still remember the incident), and was very kindly offered a glass of home brewed wheat wine which I saw was taken in a good sized tumbler from an enormous barrel in the kitchen of the farm house. The glass must have contained half a pint, and not being averse to a tippie, I consumed in a very convivial atmosphere.

When I mounted my pedal cycle to return the last 3 miles to the police house, I found that I had some difficulty in controlling the machine and I feel that I must have cycled home with

my police helmet slightly askew. Upon arrival, I found that I needed to go to bed immediately to get over the effects of my visit.

On 8th, May 1968, I had completed 8 hours duty at Fordingbridge at 2 a.m. in morning and was cycling home to Damerham Police House. I had passed Ings Pig Farm at Sandleheath and was just about 100 yards from the top of the hill and the freewheel cycle ride into Damerham Village when I became aware of beautiful bird song filling the night. One bird started up dawn in the valley below, and suddenly the whole still air was full of quite beautiful song. I stayed, transfixed by the efforts of about eight male nightingales calling to migrating females in the night, for a mate. I wonder if the nightingales still sing at Damerham