

A Tribute to PC Joe Stevens

By David Watson

During 1950 -1960 we had a PC called Joe Stevens who lived in the police house, built next to Park Avenue in the early 1950s. Joe was a very large man weighing about 23 stone and standing 6' 6" tall.

He had a very special bicycle with three cross-bars and very low starting gear which meant when he got going he could reach a very high speed quickly and catch up to most people he wanted to catch up to.

One of my memories of Joe was every Christmas the football club held a whist-drive in the village hall. It had a Xmas raffle, and all the prizes were donated by the local people. I was about 12 -13 years old and used to go round the tables during the interval with the box of all the goodies to be won. At the end of the evening a draw would be made prior to the main draw. Just as the tickets were about to be drawn, Joe's voice from the far end of the hall called out my name to ask if something was missing from the box and would I go to him? On reaching him he pulled out a small packet of Typhoo tea, which unnoticed by me, he had taken out of the box and kept hidden in his pocket for all of the second half. Everybody laughed at his prank and I felt about 2ft tall as I went back to the other end of the hall.

On another occasion I was coming down the Sloley Road with a bale of straw on my bike when I saw a light coming the other way. Lo and behold it was PC Stevens who stopped me with these words, "Have you asked the farmer for that?" My reply was, "Yes, and he said that's ok." Then PC Stevens went on his way. I didn't tell him I had had one or two before then!

After the new road to Coltishall was open, and it was on a Battle of Britain's Day being held at RAF Coltishall. As it was a very hot day I walked to the pub (Scottow Horseshoes) for a drink where PC Stevens was on point duty dealing with all the extra traffic going to the 'camp'.

I waited till he was facing Coltishall then nipped in the door and got a pint. I sat down behind the door so as not to be seen through the window. Not long afterwards the door opened and PC Stevens' hat came in followed by him. He had to bend down to get through the door. I probably trembled a bit as I was under age to be in a pub on my own.

His words were, "Hello boy Jack (after my father) does your father know you are here?" I replied, "Not at the moment but you know I came in here with him." His reply was, "If you buy me a pint I will not tell him." So he got his pint and we sat down and had a good chat.

On another occasion a car had left the road around the first bend towards Coltishall from the 'Horseshoes' pub. Why my father and I were there I don't know? What I do remember was one of the passengers was laid in the back seat.

PC Stevens got into the back of the car to check the person out. When he got back out he said to my father, "Well Jack we don't have to worry about him, he's a goner." A few minutes later the passenger started to move much to Joe's amusement.

The thing I remember most is the small size of that 1960s car and the large size of Joe, being 6ft 6" and weighing 23-24 stone, and the tight squeeze of him getting in and out of that car!

Anyway, the young man was ok and survived. His name was Billy Howlett from North Walsham.

On his retirement Joe moved with his wife Doris to a bungalow on a farm in Coltishall. However, he took the first opportunity in moving back to Scottow when buying the police house originally built for him in 1949 after its decommissioning.

What a lovely man was PC Stevens. Both he and his wife Doris Primrose, born 1909, died in 1995 and are buried at the top of Scottow cemetery.

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Acknowledgments

We are indebted to Mr Jonathan Smith and his colleagues of The Norfolk Constabulary Historians. Mr Smith is one of 6 retired police officers that have voluntarily taken on the role of historians in researching the history of the Norfolk Police, for the following information.

Pc Joe William Stevens.

He was born 29th August 1907 in Woking Surrey. At the age of 20 he joined Norfolk Constabulary on 19th May 1928 having previously been employed by Mr H J Pye Motor Engineer of Blakeney.

He was allocated the number 28 which he retained for the rest of his service.

He served in several areas of Norfolk including Cromer, Downham Market, Pelham Market, Caister-on-Sea, Blofield, Runton, Shouldham, Ellingham, and Guist, and on 26th November 1946 to Scottow. He was still serving in April 1958 which is where records we have access to cease. Normally an officer would do 30 years' service before retiring,

He has two Magistrates commendations whilst he was at Scottow, 27th February 1948 for the arrest of offenders breaking into the N A A F I at Coltishall and 22nd September 1950 for the detection of offenders for offence of larceny at Coltishall.

Discipline during his service was a regular occurrence for officers, Joe was no exception and the image of him perhaps goes with his character.

"October 1943 whilst in uniform he cycled along the Norwich - Fakenham Road at Guist with a pipe in his mouth" he was fined 2/- a week for 13 weeks".

On the 26th April we received the following nugget from Mr Jonathan Smith of The Norfolk Constabulary Historians

Hi

A little more to add to Joe's story:

I have just spoken to our senior historian a Peter Pilgram who is in his early 80s, Peter is a remarkable person who has a brain and memory that is the envy of all those who know him. I just mentioned Joe Stevens name, instantly he said "Yes Pc28 stationed at Scottow, his name was Joe and not Joseph, a very large man about 22 stone so much so he had to have a special bike"

Peter served at North Walsham from 1954 when Joe was at Scottow, Peter left North Walsham in 1962, and was aware Joe retired the following year, exact date was 1/8/1963.

Peter remembers Joe telling the story that when he had to move from one beat to another (he had 9 moves in 12 years) the removal lorry they sent had previously been used to transport Tarmac and had not been cleaned so he refused to move his furniture on it, a brave move in those draconian days.

Best wishes

Jon