

Grammar School Pupil Wilf Miller Beats a Path to Kendal Police Force

WILF MILLER – Born 1904 Interviewed 1987

I was born in Carlisle. My father was a shoemaker. I was the eldest of four boys and I was the one who went to Grammar School. Before I was 20 years old I applied to Mr Patrick O'Neill, who was then the Chief Constable of Kendal, to join Kendal police force. I was the only grammar school boy who'd ever applied in Kendal so I got the job.

I was given a uniform from PC Bull. He was a little rotund fellow and I was tall and slim. There was a man from Bristol came and measured us all for our uniforms. And when they came back we had to try them on at home. Jack Owen was the senior constable. When we came for inspection he was asked how his uniform fit. He said "The trousers are tighter than my skin, sir." "How do you make that out" he was asked. "I can sit down in my skin sir," he replied, "but I can't sit down in these trousers."

When I came to Kendal I was on night shift for seven weeks. If I had Monday off this week I worked a whole week and had Tuesday off the next week. Then I worked seven days again and had the Wednesday off, and so I worked similar shifts through to Thursday and Friday. When I came to Saturday and Sunday I had the weekend off every seven weeks. Do you know what I got then? £3.50 a week less 3 shillings and sixpence superannuation that was taken off. I had a shilling given to me to keep me in boots but I can't remember whether it was 5 shillings or 10 shillings towards my subsistence a week.

I would work from 10 o'clock at night and went through till 6, o'clock the following morning. There were four of us turned out at night. There was no shinanikins like there is in Kendal in the present time. It really was a smashing place to be for a policeman. One of the nicest places I have ever come across. When I came in, if I was on Centre Beat, that is the Centre of the town, right round the Town Hall Clock. Lowther Street, Market place and all the rest of it. I'd come in at one o'clock; have my lunch from one o'clock to half-past and I was outside until six o'clock again. There were three sergeants, 18 constables and a Chief Constable on our force. There was Centre Beat, Kirkland Beat, Strickland Beat, and Stramongate Beat.

There was a tannery at the K Shoes factory and it was on fire at Netherfield. Six o'clock in the morning somebody came running and shouted "The tannery's on fire!" There were two policemen and me at the station at the top of Lowther Street. They said "You take the cart, you'll be faster than us." I went in and got hold of the cart dragged it out. Two of them helped me up to the top of Lowther Street and Joe Park said "Mi breath's gone, I can't go any further." Jack Marshall dropped off at the top of Highgate Bank so I went on my own. I was about jiggered so, as there was nobody about, I stopped for a couple of minutes to get my breath. I wanted to go in with a flourish. I could see there were people there with this thing blazing. I came running over Netherfield Bridge and I put the barrow down tipped the thing and threw everything out into the middle of the broad. So that was the way I started my first fire.

I was here when we got the first ambulance call. I was coming off duty at 6 o'clock in the morning and a woman came rushing down Fellside, she said, "Oh Mrs So and So who lives in Syke Lane, near the Hyena Inn, she's having a baby and she is in a rough way. Can you get someone up to her?"

We'd just nicely taken over the ambulance service and Arthur Musson was the driver of this ambulance we had and this was his first time out. So they rang up Arthur, he lived down beside the Chief Constable's house down Mint Bridge. They rang him up and he got the ambulance out. I knew where this house was, just above the Hyena Pub on Syke Lane so I ran up and they said they would send Arthur up, he'd find out where it was. He came up very shortly and he and I got this woman, we had tried to get hold of a nurse or somebody in the meantime you see but they hadn't when I got there. We bundled her in and I sat in the back of the vehicle with this lady. We got to the top of Beast Banks and she gave out the most awful grief. She'd given birth to the baby just before we got into the hospital. It was born in my arms. Was I thankful when two nurses came out and relieved me.

I applied to the Chief Constable, Patrick O'Neil to be allowed to join the forces in the war. He said "You're the CID Officer, you're the Military Liaison Officer, you're chief of the ambulance section, you're fire

officer I would need about four other police men to replace you and the jobs you are doing.” I never saw any paperwork about joining the army I was too invaluable to the Chief Constable.

I had one charge of murder back in 1938. It was an awful woman. She tried to deliver a child with a knife and she killed the woman while she was doing it. It wasn't killing for the want of killing but her lack of knowledge. She got three years.

Interview – 0001 – 1987

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