

Walked 32.7 Miles a Night on his Police Beat

Harry Bleasdale was born in 1907 and interviewed in 1988

My mother and father owned a grocery and provision shop in Lostock. I worked part time in the shop until I was about fourteen. Then when I was fifteen I started doing odd weeks delivering coal. I was paid £3.10 shillings a week. I did that for about two years and then I was offered a job in a local cotton mill. I decided it was no good for me and I went back to the coal man until I was twenty and I joined the Scots Guards.

I went down to Purbright camp and was there for two years during which time I was on the Royal Guard, bank guard and did all the Guard duties at the Palace. And enjoyed every minute of it. I did almost three years and during that time my father died and I was given compassionate discharge and I went back to the shop for another few years. Then I started courting.

I always fancied the police and, when I was in the Guards, I went to Winchester and sat and passed an exam. Then I came up to Kendal with my girlfriend's father who was the Manager of EH Booths. He came and opened the shop in Kendal. I got a job in the local police and my girl-friend and I got married.

There were 23 constables, three sergeants and a Chief Constable. There was no moving from one town to another and you knew everybody in the town. So if you saw a stranger you found out what they were doing, very quietly of course. You even knew the criminals. We had Herbert Wilson, acting as a CID man. He used to check every bus – there were Express Buses then – and they used to stop in Highgate. Nearly every bus that came in he knew who was on it and he got a number arrests through watching the buses. Highgate was the main road and the only way in and out of Kendal in those days. The Police Station was on Lowther Street in the Town Hall cellar. The Weights and Measures Office was in the Police Station as well.

The town was divided into six beats. No. 1 beat was the town centre; No 2 beat was Kirkland and Beast Banks; No. 3 was the Lound and Milnthorpe Road; No. 4 was Stricklandgate and up Windermere Road as far as the boundary stone just above where Hallgarth is; No 5 went round by the station and up Shap Road; No 6 was part of Sandylands. It wasn't all built then then it came round by the High School and finished up on Canal Head. Oxenholme wasn't included in those days.

When I was walking the beat I had to check every door of every business at least twice during the night, sometimes three times. We didn't bother with private houses unless there was a downstairs window open. I had a pedometer and a jeweller in town asked me if I would test it. I put it on when I did centre beat and my mileage was 32.7 miles on one shift. I said "That can't be right." He said "It is. Do you realise the number of steps you're going up the yards at back of those properties and the workshops at the tops? And you have to climb all the steps behind the Gazette and all those places. So it shows how much a policeman does covering his beat." Of course they don't do that now.

I joined the force on April 3rd 1933 and retired on April 3rd 1958. And then spent ten years at Bela Prison manning reception.

Interview No R002

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