

Joshua Osborne

From Somerton, Suffolk

Born 1880 Died 1970

“My Grandad’s occupation during the First World War”

By Valerie Magan



Grandad Osborne was born in February 1880, into an agricultural labourer’s family. All the male members of the family followed the same route and worked on the local farm in Somerton, Suffolk, or the next village. Suffolk farms grew corn or kept cattle and pigs, and the work horses were called “Suffolk Punches”. As Grandad grew into adulthood, he told his mother “they weren’t going to make a plough boy out of him”. His brother Samuel, who was married with a family, moved with Joshua from the small village of Somerton, to London, and in 1901 they were all living together in East London. Joshua and Samuel both found work as railway porters, but it wasn’t

long before Joshua joined the Metropolitan Police Force. Then, he married a young florist, Lilian Kemp, from the East End of London, and both were very happy. Joshua was working in "K" Division of the police force. In 1911, a daughter, May, was born.

World War 1 broke out in August 1914 and during the first year of the war, all annual leave was suspended for the Metropolitan Police Force. 24,000 Special Constables were recruited to replace those officers who went off to war. Joshua remained serving in the Police Force. Despite tremendous objections that only men were suitable, women were also being recruited.

Tragedy struck Joshua and Lilian when their daughter, just three years old, died from gastro-enteritis in 1914. Lilian was beside herself with grief and felt her life would never be normal again.

In 1915, the London Ambulance Service began operation, taking over some of the duties originally performed by the Metropolitan Police. However, police in this year conveyed over 11,000 people to hospital. Little wonder, as the first Zeppelin raids began over London. By now, all London public service vehicles were either motor buses, or electric trams. There were less than 100 horse trams left in London.

By 1917, 2,300 members of the Metropolitan Police were serving in the armed forces. Joshua, though, remained in the Metropolitan Police Force.

An extraordinary encounter whilst Joshua was on police duty one day in August 1917, suddenly changed his and Lillian's life forever.

During his shift, Joshua was on duty at Goodmayes Railway Station. He was walking alongside a train when he heard the cries of a young baby coming from one of the carriages. With no parents in sight, it was obvious the baby had been abandoned, so Joshua took it to his Police Station at Chadwell Heath to report the incident, and then delivered it to Romford Workhouse, to be sheltered. The incident was reported in the Romford Times by the weekly Workhouse Committee Report.



proval.

AN ABANDONED BABY.

The Master reported that on August 21st he admitted an unknown female child, aged about one month, which was brought in by the police from Chadwell Heath. It had been found at Goodmayes railway station, in a first class carriage of a train from Liverpool-street which arrived at 5.11 p.m. The police were making inquiries.

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The police made enquiries, but to no avail. Joshua may well have felt sorry for the abandoned baby. He also probably felt that if he and Lilian could adopt it, then it was a way forward from the grief of losing their own daughter.

Joshua and Lilian Osborne applied to adopt the baby girl, and mention was made in the Romford Times Workhouse Committee Report as follows:

POLICE OFFICER'S REQUEST.

A police constable of the Metropolitan Police wrote asking to be allowed to adopt the infant found in a first-class carriage at Goodmayes Station about three weeks ago, as he and his wife had lost their only child. The letter was referred to committee.

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An entry was made on page 311 of The Committee Book of the Romford Workhouse Committee, mentioning P.C. Osborne's letter, applying to adopt the abandoned baby: 11th

311

11th September 1917

reception committee.

P. C. Osborne re
Adoption of abandoned children

A letter dated the 30th ult from P. C. Osborne offering to adopt the female child abandoned in the railway carriage at Goodmayes and brought to the Workhouse recently was read.

It was resolved that the same be referred to the Home Committee.

A report from Mr. A Page of the Romford Workhouse Committee, after visiting P.C Osborne's station sergeant, and also P.C. Osborne and his wife Lilian, at their home.

25th September 1917.

A report dated the 22nd instant from Mr A. Page respecting the application of P.C. Osborne and his wife to adopt the abandoned female child found at Goodmayes was read of which the following is a copy:-

214 Victoria Road
Romford
22 September 1917

Charles Bloomfield Esq.
re unknown female child found in a train.

Dear Sir,

I have made enquiries as to Mr J. Osborne P.C. H. 408 E of 62 Kenneth Road, Chadwell Heath, who desires to adopt the above child. The Station Sergeant at Chadwell Heath Police Station speaks very highly of Mr Osborne says he is a most respectable and trustworthy man. I found both Mr & Mrs Osborne at home when I called and from the condition of their home and the opinion I formed of them after a conversation I am sure that no better home could be found for the child. The house is beautifully kept, well furnished, and Mr & Mrs Osborne are a genial happy couple. They lost their only child some years ago when it was quite young.

Yours faithfully
Alfred Page

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Yours faithfully
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Adoption of Abandoned Female Child found at Goodmayes.

On the recommendation of the House Committee it was proposed by Mr Haslam seconded by Mr Colyer and unanimously resolved that in respect of the deserted female child aged about one month found abandoned at Goodmayes on the 21st August last, all the rights and powers of the parents shall by virtue of 62 and 63 Vict. c. 37 s. 1 rest in the Guardians until the said child attains the age of 18 years.

It was further resolved that the said child be sent to Mr and Mrs Osborne for adoption by them.

Joshua and Lillian now had another child to love and nurture. The abandoned female child was my mother.

They lived in London until 1926, when Joshua had completed his 25 years' police service. The whole family returned to the small village of Somerton, Suffolk, where Joshua had a small bungalow built for them. Despite growing up in the East End of London, Lillian adapted well to living in a remote Suffolk village and soon involved herself with church cleaning, flower arranging, selling apples and plums from their orchard, using an old pram as a wheelbarrow, that she pushed round the village. Joshua served his village well, after his career as a metropolitan police officer. He became a parish councillor and represented the parish at the rural district council meetings, cycling a good 14 mile round trip in all weathers to do so. He was instrumental in ensuring the village had a post box and a public telephone kiosk installed.

Joshua and Lillian's life didn't alter very much. They felt uncomfortable in an emerging modern world and in the late 1960s they gradually became frail and ill. Both ended their lives in the local hospital where, in those days, old people were cared for until they passed away. Lillian passed away in hospital in March 1970 aged 89, and Joshua in June 1970, aged 90.