

My Life as Hamble's Policeman

6th June 2024 - Memorial Hall

Despite being on the same day as D-Day anniversary celebrations a larger audience than expected attended, in fact a full house, to hear Ray Smout talk about 'My Life as Hamble's Policeman'. Ray was Hamble's policeman during the 1970s and he talked about his life and experiences as the village's policeman including some extremely humorous incidents.

He joined the police force in 1967 and after his initial police training, he started his career on Southampton's Weston estate. Subsequently, he was offered the job of Country Beat Officer at Hamble, part of the Netley Police section within Bitterne Division. Netley had a Sergeant, 4 officers, a detective constable and beat officers at Hamble, Bursledon and Netley Hill. Hamble was a two man beat and Ray's family lived in the police house in the old village and his colleague, who was near retirement, lived at the top end of the village.

With its oil terminal, factories, air training college and many public houses, as well as its river with famous yachting personalities, it gave Hamble's policeman a much wider variety of cases compared to other village policemen. Ray's police duties were from minor misdemeanours to dealing with the village villain and London criminals at the Hamble Manor Hotel.

Ray never gave out a parking or speeding ticket and used his friendly village policeman approach to overcome incidents. He gave an example of this when Mrs Twist, who owned a small boutique in the Square where the buses stopped, had a customer's Rolls Royce parked outside blocking the buses.

Deaths and inquests took a lot of police time, from natural causes to a person having his throat cut at Pilands Estate and suicides at Netley Psychiatric Hospital.

Due to many VIP visitors to Hamble, such as the Prime Minister and royalty, Ray had to go on a pistol training course. When Prime Minister's Edward Heath's yacht 'Morning Cloud', that was kept at Hamble, was under threat of bombing by the IRA, he had to stay on board for several nights to protect it encountering a number of interesting incidents. Ray was also sent to the Isle of Wight Pop Festival where he had another amusing encounter with a Hells Angels motorbike gang.

Ray spoke of his dealing with Hamble's problem villain who lived in Chalmers Way with his mother. Everyone was scared of him as he was a chunky built bully and had an Alsatian dog. Ray had his unique way of dealing with him but it stretched his skills when he was called to arrest him for assaulting his mother. She was a tiny lady and he picked her up in a rage and threw her over the fence into next door's garden. She died a year later when he was in prison for the assault.

Ray's claim for fame was that he was instrumental in solving a major crime in the village that led to the longest and costliest fraud trial in British history. A lady at the local estate agents informed Ray that the Hamble Manor Hotel had new owners from the East End of London and she was concerned about the circumstances.

He went there in relation to a new liqueur licence application and was very suspicious of the circumstances and he started to take car numbers of the high spending London visitors and befriended the hotel barman for information. He built a relationship with the owners who thought he was a 'good mush' and harmless.

Ray's immediate concern was that Edward Heath stayed at the hotel, so he contacted headquarters and the Prime Minister was soon asked to stay at the Royal Southern Yacht Club. A bank manager from the Royal Bank of Scotland was a regular visitor and Ray was asked to supply information to the Fraud Squad. This eventually resulted in a 128-day fraud trail where the seven accused were locked up for a total of 23 years.

The Hamble Manor Hotel case changed his life as he was promoted to Sergeant and posted to Portsmouth. While there working in the Regional Crime Squad he often dressed as a vicar in undercover operations, that continued his humorous unorthodox approach to policing. Another theme was that Ray always had a post where he could see the sea.

Ray was proud and had pride in being Hamble's policeman and thoroughly enjoyed his time in the village that was a lovely place to bring up his family. He made many long-life friends.

If you want to know more about Ray's look at the lighter side of his police work, you can buy his book 'Please Spare a Copper' from Amazon, price £8.99 and the proceeds go to the Rowan Hospice.

A thoroughly entertaining and amusing talk that was enjoyed by everyone. Afterwards many said what a loss to society that nowadays we do not have a village policeman such as Ray.