Stephen Ferris

A Victorian policeman

Stephen was the village policeman of Undy, a small village on the levels of Monmouthshire, for fifteen years and left the constabulary on retirement in 1894. He continued living with his wife and daughter in the village and died there in 1917. This is a summary of his life, with some extracts of newspaper reports of his involvement with Monmouthshire constabulary

Monmouthshire Police Constabulary was inaugurated in 1857\(^1\). An article in a local newspaper reported that ‘between 30 or 40 men have been sworn into the office of constable and are being drilled twice daily….\(^2\)

Stephen joined on the 4\(^{th}\) May 1863 as a 3\(^{rd}\) class constable 6 years after this event. Firstly posted to Monmouthshire HQ, then to Pontypool on 11\(^{th}\) June 1863 ‘to be stationed’ and then Newport on 6\(^{th}\) November 1863 for ‘Benefit to service, leaving there on 31\(^{st}\) October 1863 to go to Chepstow, and then to Portskewett on 11\(^{th}\) January 1866 when there was a ‘Cattle Plague’. He returned to Chepstow on 25\(^{th}\) March 1866 until 7\(^{th}\) April 1879, when he was posted to Magor (and Undy) on 8\(^{th}\) April 1879, and stayed as the ‘village bobby’ until his retirement on 31\(^{st}\) October 1894.

He lived not at what is now the Police House in Undy, but from 1891 in a small terrace of houses in Magor, with his wife Ellen and two daughters. He remained there until his death in 1917, and it seems as if his daughter remained there as a ‘shopkeeper’, as described in the 1939 register. A local of Undy has a memory of a ‘Miss Ferris’ who could play the piano, but she has no other memory of this lady. Ellen Ferris died aged 81 in 1950\(^3\)

Undy, a small parish in Monmouthshire, enumerated in 1861 some 400 souls. In his History of Monmouthshire Joseph Bradney explains that the parish has been at various times

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\(^1\) Gregory Margaret, PhD thesis, 20 Dec 2008, Cardiff University: “Policeman’s lot: the nature and dynamic of the Monmouthshire constabulary 1857-1914”

\(^2\) Usk Observer, Raglan Herald & Monmouthshire Central Advertiser, 30\(^{th}\) May 1857, FindmyPast: accessed 1\(^{st}\) June 2017

\(^3\) General Register Office, Mar Q 1950, Caerleon 8c 170 (online FreeBMD, accessed 22\(^{nd}\) April 2017)
written [as] ‘Wondy’ and ‘Woundy’. It stretches from the Severn estuary in the south to Penhow at its north, Magor to its west, Caldicot and Rogiett on its east. Now divided by the M4 and changed by modern development it was in 1861 a rural parish with a vicar, church, and common lands. The southern edge of Undy is part of what is called the “levels” and now a site of special scientific interest (SSSI).

Born c1838 in County Cork, Ireland, it was difficult to find and to identify who possibly who were his parents and siblings. But, in 1841 a small Irish family called ‘Pharisee’ with a 3 year old Stephen and, (possibly his parents) Dennis 40, Ellen 25 and Mary 1 are living at ‘Borthmorter’ Caerwent, Monmouthshire, all are born in Ireland. Nearby there are other Irish residents. Perhaps allowing for the Irish accent ‘Pharisee’ could be interpreted as ‘Ferris’, and by 1851 a Dennis Ferris, born Castle Freake, Cork, a Tailor is living at Llanvaches, Monmouthshire with his wife Ellen born Killenen and a growing family, Mary, 11, James 9, Margaret 7, and Joanna 5. All these later children are born at Caerwent. Stephen, who would be aged 13, is not with Dennis, but working as a farm servant at Caerwent, Crick Hamlet for Daniel Plaisted a farmer of 230 acres and who was born in Newnham, Gloucestershire. In 1861 he is still a farm servant but working at Jamerson Farm for John Skinner, Farm Bailiff, born Scotland, at Christchurch near Caerleon. John Skinner was one of Stephen’s referees when he applied to join Monmouthshire constabulary and Skinner’s job description, at Stephen’s application, is ‘Bailiff to J Logan Esq – 13 months’.

Stephen married Ellen COONEY in 1867, (she too can be found working as a servant in 1851 at a small farm in Caerwent), and they subsequently had three children. Ellen (1868), Mary Ann (1870) and James (1872-1872), all born in the Chepstow registration district; no baptisms of the children, or their marriage can be found online, it appears that the Catholic registers for Chepstow are not online. The burial of his infant son James was recorded in the County Observer & Monmouthshire Central Advertiser, as ‘at Raglan Lodge, Chepstow October 31st James, infant son of Mr Stephen Ferris aged 7 weeks.’ His wife died 1903, so by 1911 Stephen can be seen in the census with his unmarried daughter Ellen, a widower and a police

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2. TNA census returns HO 107/745/2
3. Ibid
4. TNA census returns HO107/2443 f 72; Page: 20
5. TNA census returns RG9/4013 f71 p24
6. GRO ref, June Q 1867, Chepstow 11a 28
7. TNA census returns RG9/3974 f51 p1
Stephen Ferris
A Monmouthshire Policeman

It is assumed that Mary Ann Ferris married, but with such a common forename, and Ferris not being as unusual as originally thought, a suitable marriage has so far not been found. Stephen seems to have been settled in Magor, his daughter remained living in the family house until she died. She is recorded in the 1939 register as a ‘shopkeeper’.  

His name appears in numerous newspaper reports over the years he held his position with the Monmouthshire constabulary, and his service record is evident of his up and slightly down career. Nevertheless he does continue and eventually goes to pension, which, from investigating other men’s careers in the Monmouth Police appears to be quite admirable.

His role in keeping the peace in Monmouthshire reveals itself in a variety of ways. Men were charged with cursing, or ‘Profane swearing. William Evans was charged with this offence by PC Ferris by refusing to go home quietly.’ The control of alcohol usage was apparently paramount and a Job James in 1872 was charged with keeping his house open for the sale of beer at prohibited hours but the case was dismissed, PC Ferris had given the bench the information. In 1868 he charged a man with begging, and in 1870 two men refused to leave the Three Tuns of Chepstow, where the landlady had PC Ferris there to back her case against them. Many cases of a similar ilk are to be found in the Monmouthshire newspapers, but Ferris himself was forfeited his increases in pay due to him slipping off the straight and narrow of abstinence. In 1865, July 31st he was fined three days’ pay for being ‘under the influence of drink’ and in 1866, July 2nd fined 7 days’ pay as he was ‘under the influence of liquor.’

The longest and front-page spread on the newspapers in which Stephen was to play a minor part was headlined as ‘Murder at Llanwern’. He played a small part in the investigation, searching for evidence, but nevertheless he may have well talked in later years about this crime. The Monmouthshire Merlin of the 19th December 1879 makes most of the case in great detail reporting blow by blow a full page account of the circumstances of the murder.

A labourer, Henry Waters and his wife Eliza who both lived in a cottage near to the station at Llanwern had been on a visit to Newport, and to some local public houses. Eliza disappeared after they had returned, and her body was found in a ditch the following morning.

11 TNA census returns RG14/31953/0111/06
12 FindmyPast, TNA RG101/7475E/006/39 accessed 2nd June 2017
13 FindmyPast, Chepstow Weekly Advertiser 9th December 1865
14 FindmyPast, Chepstow Weekly Advertiser 9th March 1872
15 FindmyPast, Chepstow Weekly Advertiser 19th Dec 1868 & 22 January 1870
From the report it appears that a small contingent of Police from around the county, a PC Milsom from Witson, PS Williams from Risca, and Stephen Ferris from Undy were sent to assist in the investigation. These men, and maybe others not mentioned in the report were involved into searching the area around the woman’s body and home to find evidence. Ferris found a pair of brown corduoy trousers and a pair of stockings. At the Newport County Magistrates Court, Waters was found guilty and committed to take trial at the Assizes the following year.

A search for “Murder at Llanwern” at the National Library of Wales free access to Welsh newspapers produced eleven results\textsuperscript{16}. The Weekly Mail, Monmouthshire Merlin, Pontypool Free Press & Herald, The Western Mail all covered the story over the months the case took to conclude. In the end Henry Waters was found not guilty.

Stephen seems to have lived a fairly normal life for a constable of Monmouthshire constabulary, didn’t climb the ranks, but lived fairly modestly in the small village of Magor. Nothing sensational, nothing extraordinary; but maybe he was a pillar of the community, and the bane of small boys when they were up to normal small boy’s mischief.

\textsuperscript{16} \url{http://newspapers.library.wales/}, accessed 30\textsuperscript{th} May 2017
Appendix 1:

Record of Service

Name: Stephen FERRIS
No: 88
Age: 25
Height: 5'8 ¾”
Complexion: Fresh
Eyes: Blue
Hair: Brown
Marks: cut on upper lip
Where born:
  Parish – nk
  Town -
  County – Cork,
  Ireland
Trade: Farm Labourer
Understand Welsh: No
Single or Married: single
Children: -
Residence: Llanvair Discoed
What public service
Length of
Date of discharge
Nil
Pension

With whom last employed: Mr James Hill
And where: Caerwent
Recommended:
  Mr FH Langley – 15 years
  Charles Llay – Cardiff – 18mnths
  John Skinner, Bailiff to J Logan Esq – 13mnths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where stationed</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
<th>Cause of removal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HQ</td>
<td>4th May 1863</td>
<td>10th June 1863</td>
<td>On joining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pontypool</td>
<td>11th June 1863</td>
<td>5th November 1865</td>
<td>To be stationed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>6th November 1865</td>
<td>31st October 1865</td>
<td>Benefit to service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chepstow</td>
<td>1st November 1865</td>
<td>10th January 1866</td>
<td>Benefit to service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portskewett</td>
<td>11th January 1866</td>
<td>24th March 1866</td>
<td>Cattle plague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chepstow</td>
<td>25th March 1866</td>
<td>7th April 1879</td>
<td>Benefit of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magor</td>
<td>8th April 1879</td>
<td>31st October 1894</td>
<td>On promotion of PC Pask</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stephen Ferris – no 88 [record of service incidents]

1863

17 Gwent Record Office; D3297/2 Register of Officers & Constables 1858 – 1897 –
May 18th Joined as 3rd class constable
October 9th Promoted to 2nd class
1865
February 10th – Fined one day’s pay – “absent from a conference point”
July 31st – Fined 4 days’ pay – “Under the influence of drink”
1866
July 2nd Fined 7 days’ pay – “under the influence of liquor”
1867
May 1st Promoted to 1st Class Constable
October 7th Fined one day’s pay “leaving his beat.”
1871
July 1st Fined one day’s pay – “Delay in returning to his station.”
1872
July 1st Promoted to “Merit Class” with an increase of pay of 2d per day
November 11th “Merit Class” abolished – Granted extra pay for 5 years service as 1st class according to
new scale
1876
November 1st Granted 1d per day extra pay for 9 years’ service as 1 CC
1882
August 1st Ordered to forfeit 1d per day good conduct pay “Under influence of drink when on inquiry”
December 1st Granted 1d per day increase of pay – Apprehending two horse stealing
1885
August 8th Ordered to forfeit 3d per day good conduct pay – negligence in allowing a prisoner to escape
1886
September 30th Reduced to 2nd class constable – drinking in a Public House when on county duty
1887
September 30th Re-instated to 1st Class Constable
1889
September 30th Granted first increase of 1d per day – 2 years as 1CC
1891
February 1st Granted first increase of 2d (new scale)
1892
February 1st Granted 2nd increase of 2d
1893
February 1st Granted 3rd increase of 2d
1894
Pensioned

(Copy of discharge etc)
At a meeting of the SJ Committee on the 10th October 1894 granted an annuity of £51.14.0 from the
pension fund.

July 3rd 1901
“this is to certify that Stephen Ferris joined the MCC on the 4th May 1863 as third class constable and
was promoted to the first class on 30th September 1887. He was granted Merit Pay with three G[ood]
C[onduct] Badges and resigned on pension on the 1st of November 1894. Conduct “Very Good”.

Died 20 July 1917
Possible family tree of Stephen

Stephen Ferris
A Monmouthshire Policeman

Dennis FERRIS
bc 1795 Cork IRE
(is PHARISEE 1841)
Bur Caerwent 5 Mar
1870 age 78

Ellen McCarthy
(Poss bur Caerwent
24 Oct 1884)

Stephen
bc1836
Cork IRE

Ellen
COONEY

Mary 1840
Caerwent, Mon

James

Margaret

Joanna

Ellen
1868 Chepstow

Mary Ann
1870 Chepstow

James
1872
d 1872
Chepstow

Ellen McCarthy

Other Ferris baptisms in Chepstow district:

23rd Oct 1836
Louisa Edwards d/o William & Louisa
Edwards FERRIS (late policeman)
20th Jan 1839
William Henry s/o William & Lydia FERRIS, Matherne, Publican