

## Death in the Afternoon

How the fine career of Tisbury's Superintendent Bull came to a tragic end



The Spring Cart used by Police Officers of the time

In 1889 a new police station was built in Tisbury. As well as private living accommodation for four police families, it contained offices from where the Tisbury & Mere Divisions were controlled, four cells for prisoners and a Court. Here Petty Sessions were held in the sessions hall on the first and last Wednesday of each month at 11am when wrongdoers got their rightful punishments from the Magistrates.

At this time Wiltshire employed a little more than 200 policemen with the county divided into 9 Divisions each under the authority of a Superintendent and, although this was one of the smallest, it still stretched from Stourton to Alvediston with 11 village police stations in between.

The officer in charge at Tisbury was Supt. Frederick Bull, lately moved from Hindon where the Division's Headquarters had previously been. He, along with the assistance of about 14 Constables and 2 Sergeants, was responsible to the Chief Constable Captain Robert Sterne.

Frederick Bull had been born in 1839 at Camerton near Radstock. He worked as a gardener before joining the Wiltshire constabulary as a 22 year old and was first stationed at Ramsbury. Early in his career promotion seems to have been slow for it took him 13 years to make Sergeant, but by 1880 he was an Inspector stationed at Devizes and only 2 years later, Superintendent at Hindon.

By 1892 he was well settled at Tisbury. Never losing his youthful interest in gardening, his efforts around the new police station were greatly admired. A bit of a stickler for discipline, he was however able to tread that narrow path between firmness and familiarity that gained the respect of his colleagues. As far as the public were concerned, it was accepted that he did a first class job, enjoying popularity with all classes.

One aspect of his work was to liaise with the local Magistrates and it was this that necessitated a trip to Wardour Castle on Saturday afternoon 30<sup>th</sup> July 1892, for he needed Lord Arundell's signature on a summons. With this journey in mind, he instructed his groom, PC Jows, to have the horse harnessed into his trap by 2.15pm.

Lord John Arundell, the 12<sup>th</sup> Baron, was Chairman of the local Magistrates and also Deputy Lieutenant of the County. Both men being about the same age, constantly in touch with each other and both having a major interest in the maintenance of law and order, they would almost certainly have developed a respect for one another even if their social positions did not permit a friendship.

The weather had been settled for the past fortnight and this was another glorious day. As he trotted along the road from Tisbury to Wardour, Supt. Bull would have looked across the Nadder Valley to see the last of the hay being gathered and the harvest about to begin. His mind may have been on the sad murder three months earlier of his Warminster colleague, Sgt Enos Molden, a crime for which the culprit, John Gurd, had been hanged the previous Tuesday. If he had chosen this time to look back on his police service it would have been with a degree of pride, for he had come a long way in the past 30 years and now held a position of considerable esteem. After all, not too many people could call at Wardour Castle unannounced and request an audience with Lord Arundell, whatever their business.

Supt. Bull was a married man; his wife was from Trowbridge and he was the father of several children, the eldest of whom were already self-supporting. Only 52 years old and still in the best of health, he might have been visualising smooth progress towards retirement. Yet fate was about to deal him the cruellest card.

When he arrived at Wardour Castle, Lord Arundell was about to go for a ride around his estate. As the business in hand would only take a minute or two, Supt. Bull left his horse and trap unattended in order to hold Lord Arundell's horse for him while the latter went into the castle to sign the papers. It seems possible that at this time the police horse was grazing quietly on the edge of the castle lawns when it may have trodden on its reins. Let his Lordship continue:

“When I came out of the house we noticed the horse had slipped the bridle off its head. The superintendent went towards the horse, which started off. He went after it and on overtaking the horse he stepped on the bridle with the intention of stopping it. He put his foot between the blinkers, which held his foot, and threw him to the ground under the wheels of the trap. The horse took fright and galloped on. I was only 50 yards away when I saw the wheels pass over his body and legs. I held him until assistance came. He complained of pain in his heart and asked if his horse could not be caught. Within about 20 minutes, he had quietly passed away”.

Dr. Ensor told the Coroner on the following Monday that the deceased appeared to have broken four ribs on his right side but there were no other outward signs of injury. From the appearance of the body, the doctor came to the conclusion that he had “ruptured an internal blood vessel and bled inwardly”. The Jury returned a verdict of accidental death.

The funeral took place two days later, the Rev. F.E. Hutchinson officiating. One can imagine the solemn drama that Tisbury witnessed that day. The coffin was polished elm with massive brass furniture bearing the inscription “I go to prepare a place for you” and “Thy will be done” and borne from the police station to the parish church of St. John the Baptist by fellow members of the force.



Frederick Bull's grave

As the church bell tolled, the mournful procession crossed the town square filled with saddened onlookers. The blinds of businesses and private houses were drawn, men removed their hats and eyes were lowered. Supt. Bull's wife and children led the mourners who included Captain Stern and Lord Arundell. Colonel Best and Captain Chaloner represented the Magistrates. Behind them followed the leading inhabitants of the neighbourhood, many having come from Hindon where Supt. Bull used to live.

The press had this to say:

“To know him was to like him. He was a man of whom a good word could always be said and his lamentable death is not only loss to the force of which he was a credit, but to the town in which he was a resident”.

The author of this sad story wonders whether anyone has a photograph of Frederick Bull or can add anything of substance to this tale. Frederick was the Great Grandfather of the author's wife.

*Written by Mr. Bernard Pike, a native of Semley, and reproduced here with his kind permission.*