

# THE FATEFUL NIGHT OF 16<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 1910

## THE STORY OF A LONDON POLICEMAN WHO WAS THERE

### INTRODUCTION

Frederick William Smoothy was an unmarried City of London policeman who was based at Bishopsgate Police Station. He was on duty on the evening of 16<sup>th</sup> December and was one of the officers who were involved in an incident near Houndsditch which resulted in one of the largest multiple murders of police officers ever carried out in Britain. Some of the unmarried Policemen killed or wounded were not only his colleagues they also lived in the same accommodation at Bishopsgate as PC Smoothy. The medals that he received are those which all officers serving in the City of London Police at that time would have received. However his group of medals acted as a trigger for me to research the man. In doing so I discovered he was involved in a case that shocked the whole of Britain and is now referred to as The Houndsditch Murders.

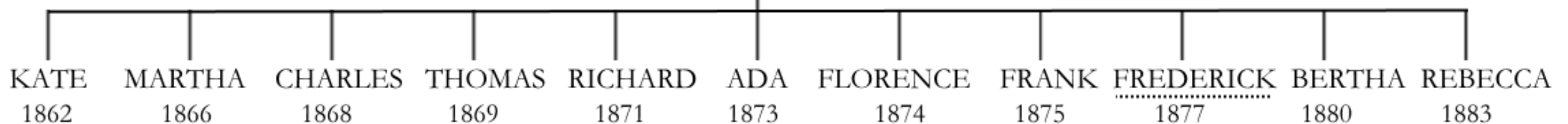


CITY OF LONDON POLICE HELMET PLATE c1900

### EARLY LIFE

Frederick was born in 1877 in the village of Galleywood near Chelmsford in Essex. His father, Charles, described himself in the 1881 Census as a Farmer of 187 Acres employing four men and four boys. Frederick was one of eleven children born to Charles and Catharine Smoothy whose family comprised six girls and five boys.

CHARLES SMOOTHY - CATHARINE MISSEN      m1861



ENTRANCE TO L.N.W.R. BROAD STREET STATION 1898

By 1891 the family had moved to Old Riffhams in Little Baddow. Charles Smoothy is still recorded as a Farmer with two of his sons, Charles and Frank, working for him. Frederick stayed with his family until 1899 when he moved to London.

In August 1899 he started working for the London and North Western Railway Company. From Oct 1899 he was employed at Broad Street Station as a Porter. This was a major terminal station in the City of London, close to Liverpool Street Station. Usage was at its peak in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but it later suffered from competition, mainly from the London Underground; it finally closed in 1986. The station was demolished and was redeveloped as the Broadgate office and shopping complex. Having worked for the L.N.W.R. for eleven months Frederick Smoothy applied to join the City of London police.

In his application form to join the Police, Smoothy gave Mr R Castleman the Traffic Superintendent at Broad Street Station as his principal referee with supporting testimonials from people who had known him in Little Baddow, the local Vicar and a Police Sergeant. Candidates for the City of London Police had to pass a strict medical and meet a number of conditions: be between 20 and 27 years old, be at least five foot ten inches in height without shoes, not have more than two children, be able to read and write legibly and be prepared to reside within the City of London during their time in the Police Service. Frederick Smoothy completed the necessary paperwork for his application on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1900.

## HIS EARLY DAYS IN THE POLICE

PC Smoothy joined the City Police on a pay of twenty five shillings a week (£1.25). He was allocated the Warrant Number 7136 and his helmet and collar numbers appears to have been 999. This was then changed to 399, probably around 1909 when new helmet plates were introduced. These had a trefoil shaped number plate which incorporated a letter to indicate which division the man was serving in; the letter C was used to designate Bishopsgate officers. Smoothy's number was again changed to 299 later in his police career which possibly aligns with the practice in the Metropolitan Police of giving lower collar numbers as they become available to PCs with more years service. Interestingly the City of London Police still use the original dies to manufacture their helmet plates although the central design now has gold colour baked onto it and anodized (Staybrite) letter and numbers have replaced the previous brass material.



HELMET PLATE DESIGN USED FROM 1909

The 1901 Census shows Frederick Smoothy living in police accommodation at Bishopsgate Police Station. At the same address are listed another 38 Police Officers comprising one Sergeant and the remainder unmarried Constables. This includes three officers whose names will re-occur later – Constables William Choat, Ernest Woodhams and Arthur Strongman.

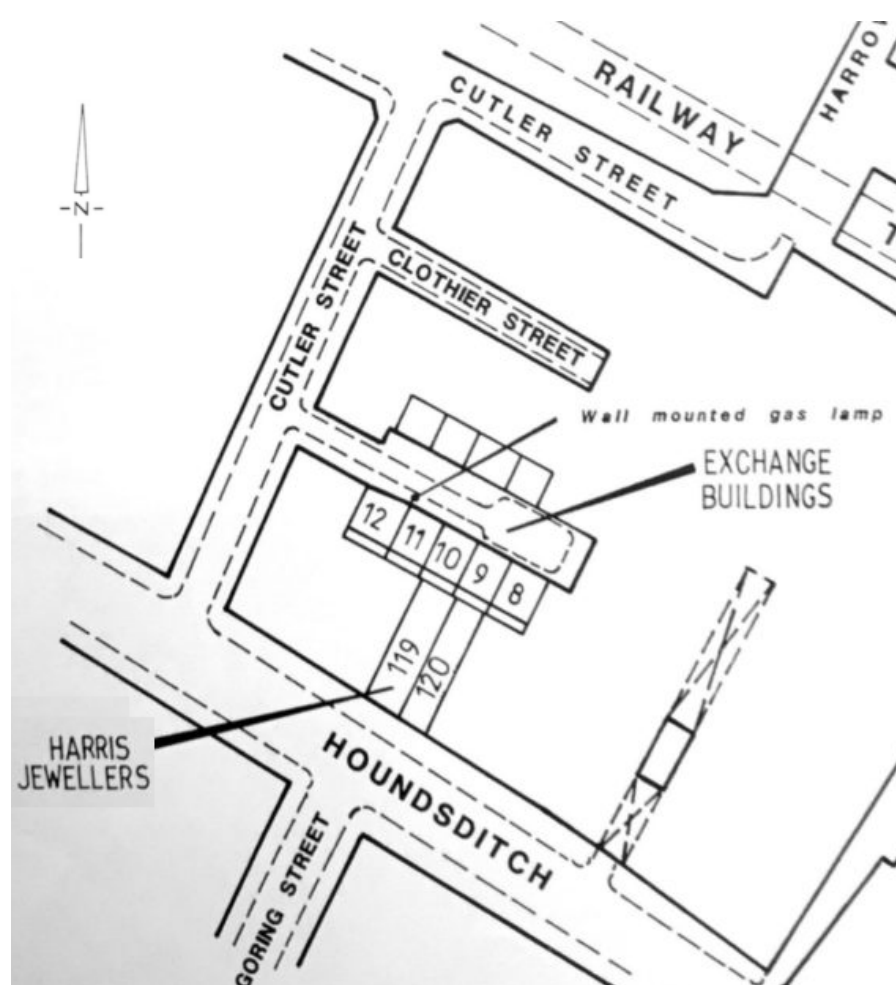


On the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1902 King Edward VII was crowned at Westminster Abbey. This was followed by a procession through the streets of London with officers from the City of London and Metropolitan Police Forces lining the route. All officers of the City of London Force subsequently received the Coronation (Police) Medal 1902 with the City of London Police reverse. In all 1060 bronze and 5 silver medals were issued. Smoothy received his medal which is engraved on the rim P.C. F.W. Smoothy. The inclusion of his second initial is very significant in that Frederick's older brother Frank had followed in Frederick's footsteps and had also joined the City of London Police. He also received Police Coronation Medals which are named as just P.C. F. Smoothy. Fortunately a Curator of the City of London Police Museum has confirmed mine are the medals of Frederick. There is no more information on Frederick's police career until December 1910.

## 16<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 1910 – THE PRELUDE

Around 10 pm on that Friday Max Weill the owner of No. 120 in the Houndsditch returned to his fancy goods shop which was next to No. 119, a jewellers owned by H.S. Harris. Weill lived in a flat over his business with his sister and a servant. The two women complained that there were strange noises coming from downstairs at the back of the shops. Max Weill went to the rear of his shop but could see nothing wrong so he went outside to check if anyone was still working at Harris' next door. Aware that the shop would be closed on the Saturday he thought it best to report the matter to the Police. In nearby Bishopsgate he found a young PC, Walter Piper, who went with him to his shop and they listened to the noises which sounded like drilling, sawing and breaking of bricks.

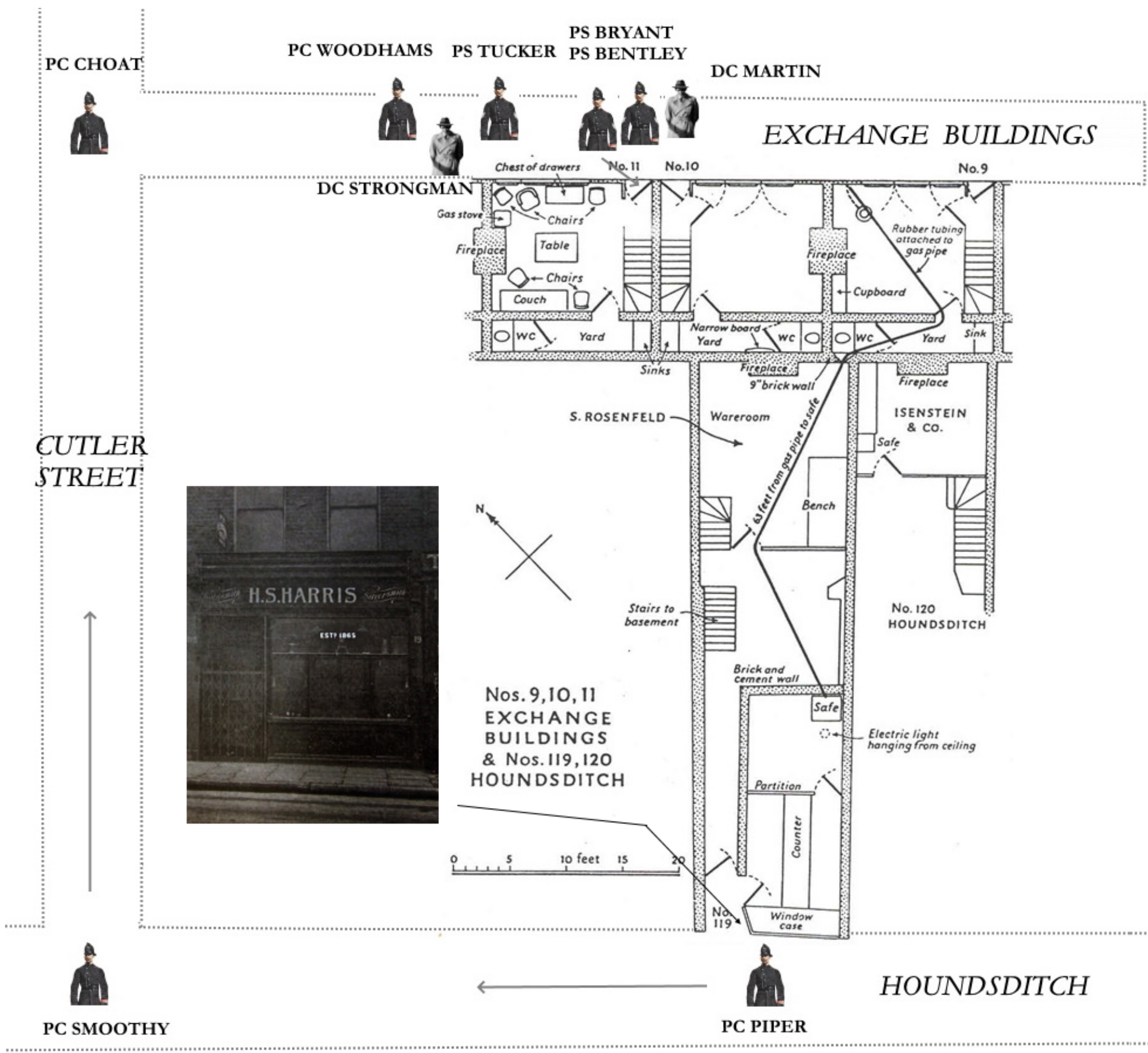
Piper went up Cutler Street into the cul-de-sac Exchange Buildings. He enquired at No. 12 if anyone was working in the backyard. Having satisfied himself nothing was wrong there he tried No. 11. The door was opened by a man, who he later identified as Gardstein. The furtive manner of the man made Piper immediately suspicious. Rather than repeat his question PC Piper asked the first thing that came into his head 'Is the missus in?' The man shook his head and said 'She has gone out'. Piper left Exchange Buildings and went into Cutler Street. He noticed a man looking at the houses in Exchange Buildings.



In Houndsditch PC Piper encountered two Constables, Walter Choat and Ernest Woodhams on their beats. He informed them of Weill's suspicions before he headed towards nearby Bishopsgate Police Station to bring further officers. PCs Choat and Woodhams decided to set up a cordon around the property. PC Woodhams went up Cutler Street and waited by the entrance to Exchange Buildings so he can watch the houses which backed onto Harris' shop. PC Choat waited outside the Jewellers Shop. This ensured that anyone leaving either the houses in Exchange Buildings or from the Jewellers in Houndsditch would be seen by one of the police officers.

On his way to the Police Station PC Piper met one of the duty Sergeants Robert Bentley, with two plain clothes Constables Arthur Strongman and James Martin. Strongman was sent back to the Station and PS Bentley went with Weill into his shop. They heard the hammering which stopped when they started speaking. Outside No. 120 Houndsditch Strongman was waiting with three officers, Sergeants William Bryant and Charles Tucker, and Constable Frederick Smoothy. Chief Inspector Hayes had advised them he was suspicious of some foreigners living on the right hand side of Exchange Buildings which backed onto the Jewellers Shop.

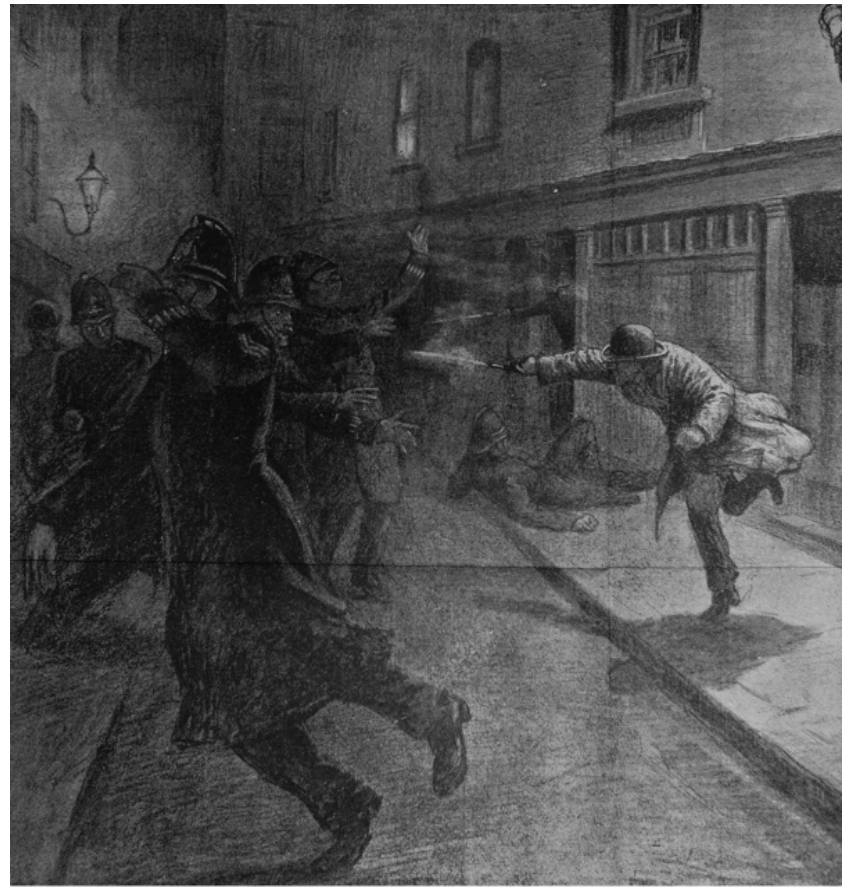
Young PC Piper was a probationer so he was positioned in what was considered the safest place, outside Harris' Jewellers Shop. PC Choat took PC Woodhams' place on the corner of Cutler Street. To complete the chain PC Smoothy was positioned at the junction of Houndsditch and Cutler Street. The remaining officers then all went into Exchange Buildings and moved towards No. 11. Sergeant Bentley was followed by Sergeant Bryant and Constable Martin. Sergeant Tucker and Constables Strongman and Woodhams were behind them. The officers, armed only with short wooden truncheons, were positioned approximately as shown below. It was now about 11.30 p.m. when Sergeant Bentley knocked on the door of No.11 Exchange Buildings.



## THE SHOOTINGS IN EXCHANGE BUILDINGS

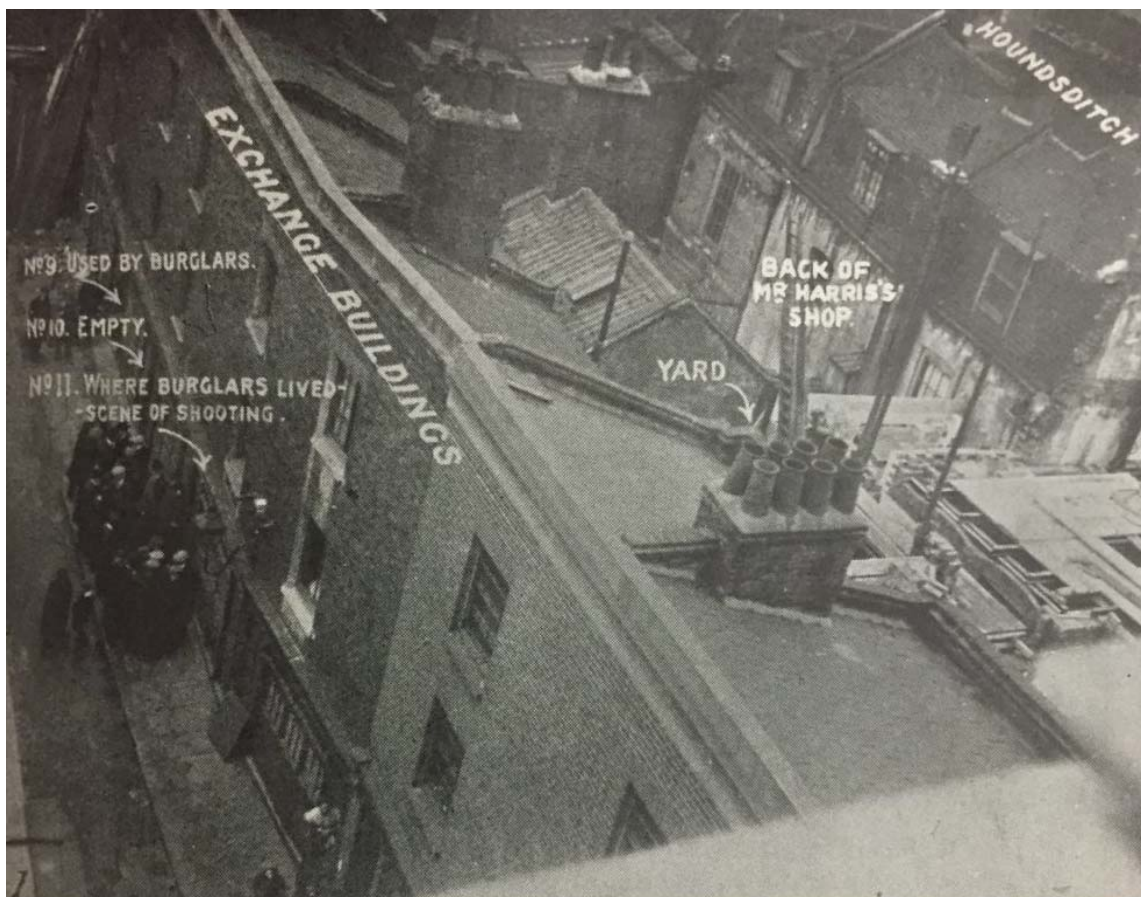
The door was opened by Gardstein and Sergeant Bentley asked if anyone was working out the back. He received no reply and Gardstein partly closed the door before moving back up the stairs. Bentley waited before pushing the door open and stepped into the house. He repeated his question adding they wanted to look. The man on the stairs gestured towards the rear door. At this point the rear door opened and a man came in armed with a pistol. He fired at Bentley and Gardstein who was on the stairs also opened fire. One bullet hit Bentley in his right shoulder; the second struck the right hand side of his neck. He staggered back and collapsed backwards over the doorstep. Sergeant Bryant had been standing behind him and when the shooting started instinctively put his hand up. He too was shot both in the hand and in the chest and fell into the roadway. Constable Martin was standing behind the two Sergeants and in his evidence stated he was knocked over by Bryant as he fell.

On seeing the officers falling PC Woodhams rushed forward to assist them. His left leg buckled as he fell, shot by one of the assailants with a bullet wound that shattered his thigh bone. Gardstein came out of the doorway and fired in the direction of Sergeant Tucker and Constable Strong. Sergeant Tucker was hit in the stomach and in the heart. Arthur Strongman supported PS Tucker taking him towards Cutler Street, Gardstein continued to follow them, still firing rapidly. As Gardstein reached the entrance to Exchange Buildings only PC Choat was left to stop him. He was 6 feet 4 inches tall and of big build and he caught hold of Gardstein and tried to wrestle the gun from him. During their struggle Gardstein continued trying to shoot PC Choat. Two other gang members came out of the house and started shooting at PC Choat. In all the PC was shot six times and one of the bullets fired by the accomplices had also hit Gardstein in the back. The two accomplices managed to get Choate to release their leader and carried him away from the scene. They were followed by a woman, Nina Vassileva, who had also come out of No. 11 and followed the gunmen down the road to Cutler Street.



THE ASSAULT ON THE POLICE AS PORTRAYED BY THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

PC Smoothy had run up Cutler Street and was faced with a scene of utter carnage. He went to assist Constable Strongman with the dying Sergeant Tucker. By the time PC Piper arrived at Exchange Buildings Frederick Smoothy was already trying to help PS Tucker who was lying on the ground. Piper went to try and get an ambulance for the injured officers. Some of the local residents also came out to help and soon more Police Officers arrived from Bishopsgate Police Station. In his book 'The Houndsditch Murders and the Siege of Sidney Street' the author Donald Rumbelow states that PC Smoothy (spelt incorrectly as Smoothy) took Sergeant Tucker to the London Hospital in a car commandeered by PC Piper in the Houndsditch. In fact PC Smoothy took PC Choat to the London Hospital and as they had no transport they had rested Choat over a bicycle which PC Smoothy then pushed to the Hospital. He later told his son Robert that as he pushed the bicycle he could see one of wounds in PC Choat's back.



VIEW OF EXCHANGE BUILDINGS AND THE REAR OF HARRIS' SHOP

Sergeant Tucker was examined by Dr Rainey at about 11.50 pm but he was already dead, killed by the bullet through his heart. Rainey also examined PC Choat who had six wounds but he died at 5.20 a.m. 17<sup>th</sup> Dec. Dr Biggar at St Bartholomew's Hospital examined Sergeant and the bullet in right side of his neck had partly severed his spinal cord. He died around 7.30 p.m. 17<sup>th</sup> Dec. Dr Biggar noted that the direction of the bullets was from right to left and not down, so his assailant must have fired from straight opposite which indicates the unknown gunman who entered through the rear ground floor door killed him and not Gardstein who was on the stairs.

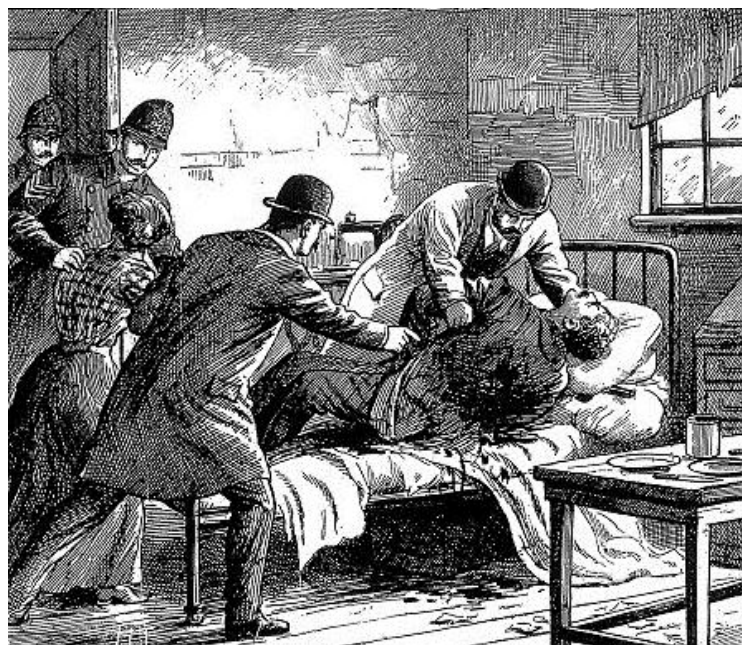
PS Bryant and PC Woodhams recovered from their wounds. However as a result of his injuries PC Woodhams' left leg was shorter than his right leg.

## THE INVESTIGATION BEGINS

Detective Superintendent John Ottaway became aware of what had happened at about midnight on 16<sup>th</sup> Dec. He went to Exchange Buildings which was then surrounded with Police and went into No. 11 Exchange Buildings. There were two broken panes of glass in the window by the door. One was apparently from a bullet fired from the stairs. There were also two bullet holes in the ceiling, possibly warning shots fired in the air by one of the men before he left the house. Two bottles were found in a cupboard; later the finger prints on them were identified as those of Nina Vassileva. Ottaway then went into No. 10 which was empty although in the back yard there was a stall board similar to the top of a costermonger's barrow. The separating wall between Nos. 9, 10 and 11 was about seven feet high and there were signs of persons having clambered between the three houses, the stall board would have assisted that. Ottaway found there was no furniture in No. 9. An additional lock had been recently fitted on the front door and the key for that was later found on Gardstein's body. There were various tools, drills, crowbars and a large gas cylinder found in the house together with a coil of 63 feet of india rubber piping. This was just sufficiently long enough to go from the gas socket in the front room to the safe at the back of Harris' shop. By the toilet there was a large opening in the brickwork of the dividing wall between the yard and the back of Harris' shop.



VIEW OF EXCHANGE BUILDINGS



POLICE FINDING GARDSTEIN'S BODY  
(THE ILLUSTRATED POLICE NEWS)

There were a large number of Russian immigrants living in that part of London. Many had extreme left wing views which concerned the local people. So when the Police began questioning the local residents in The Cutler's Arms Public House they were eager to assist the officers. The Police were starting to compile a list of the known associates of the people living at No. 11 Exchange Buildings.

The gang leader Gardstein had been taken to 59 Grove Street and died there at around 9.00 a.m. the next day. Doctor Scanlon had been called in the early hours of the morning of 17<sup>th</sup> Dec and returned at 11.00 a.m. to find Gardstein dead. Unaware of what had happened at Exchange Buildings he reported the death to the Coroner. The Police were informed and found Gardstein's body at No. 59 Grove Street. At the house they also found a woman called Sara Trassjonsky; she was arrested by Detective Inspector Frederick Wensley.

At the mortuary Gardstein was cleaned up and photographed, the image was used for posters seeking information on the case. This proved very productive as members of the public came forward with information which resulted in the arrest of two possible suspects, Peters and Dubof, on 22<sup>nd</sup> December.

The Police were able to identify the weapons used in the shootings as Dreyse and Mauser Pistols. On 23<sup>rd</sup> December identity parades were held at Bishopsgate Police Station. One witness named Isaac Levy had reported he was threatened by two armed men he had seen carrying away the wounded Gardstein, with a woman following them. He picked out Peters and Dubof as the two men and Vassileva as the woman. However none of the Police Officers present at the scene of the shooting picked out either of these two men. This included PC Piper who had seen a man standing at the entrance to Exchange Buildings when he first went to No. 11; he initially thought the man might be Dubof.

**CITY OF LONDON POLICE.**  
**MURDER OF POLICE OFFICERS.**

**£500 REWARD**

WHEREAS Sergeants Charles Tucker and Robert Bentley, and Constable Walter Charles Choat, of the City of London Police, were murdered in Exchange Buildings, in the said City, at 11.30 p.m., on the 16th December, 1910, by a man who is now dead, and other persons now wanted, whose descriptions are given below, and who were also concerned with the deceased Murderer in attempting to feloniously break and enter a Jeweller's shop, and killed the Officers to prevent arrest.

**PORTRAIT AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DEAD MURDERER.**

Name said to be **GEORGE GARDSTEIN**, alias **POOLKA MILOWITZ**.

Both may be incorrect.

**DESCRIPTION:**  
Age about 24, height 5ft. 9 in., complexion pale, hair brown, slight dark moustache worn slightly up at ends, good physique.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE PERSONS WANTED.**

**FIRST.**—A man named **FRITZ SVARRS**, lately residing at 59, Grove Street, Commercial Road, London, E., age about 24 or 25, height 5 feet 8 or 9 inches, complexion sallow, hair fair, medium moustache—turned up at ends, lighter in colour than hair of head—eyes grey, nose rather small—slightly turned up—chin a little upraised, has a few small pimples on face, cheek-bones prominent, shoulders square, but bend slightly forward; dress brown tweed suit (thin light stripes), dark melton overcoat (velvet collar, nearly new), usually wears a grey Irish tweed cap (red stripes), but has been sometimes seen wearing a trilby hat; a Locksmith; native of Liban, Russia.

**SECOND.**—A man known as "**PETER THE PAINTER**," also lately residing at 59, Grove Street, Commercial Road, London, E., age 28 to 30, height 5 feet 9 or 10 inches, complexion sallow, hair and medium moustache black, clear skin, eyes dark, medium build, reserved manner; dress brown tweed suit (bead dark stripes), black overcoat (velvet collar, rather old), black hard felt hat, black lace boots, rather shabby, believed to be a native of Russia.

Both are Anarchists.

**THIRD.**—A woman, age 26 to 30, height 5 feet 4 inches, slim build, fairly full breasts, complexion medium, face somewhat drawn, eyes blue, hair brown; dress dark three-quarter jacket and skirt, white blouse, large black hat (trimmed black silk), light-coloured shoes.

The above reward of £500 will be paid by the Commissioner of Police for the City of London to any person who shall give such information as shall lead to the arrest of these persons, or in proportion to the number of such persons who are arrested.

Information to be given to the City Police Office, 26, Old Jewry, London, E.C., or at any Police Station.

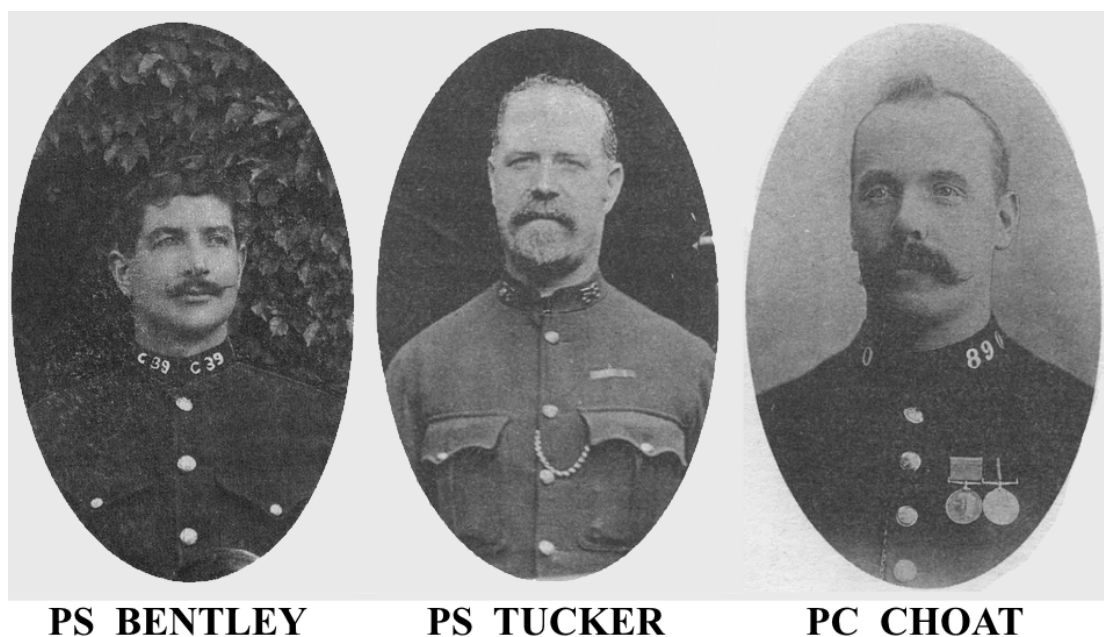
City Police Office,  
26, Old Jewry, London, E.C.  
22nd December, 1910.

**J. W. NOTT BOWER,**  
Commissioner of Police for  
the City of London.

Late on New Year's Day a member of the public came forward with information about two possible further suspects Svaaars and Sokoloff who were staying at No. 100 Sidney Street. On 4<sup>th</sup> January the Siege of Sidney Street took place. The Police had surrounded the building and cleared the residents. The Scots Guards were called in to support the Police. After six hours the siege ended when the building caught fire. The bodies of the two wanted men were found inside; one of the wanted men had been shot before the fire took hold. The image of Gardstein and some of the Russians/Latvians investigated by the Police are shown below:



## THE STATE FUNERALS



On 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec a public memorial service was held at St Paul's Cathedral. The King was represented by his Groom in Waiting; Winston Churchill, the Home Secretary and the Lord Mayor of London also attended. Around ten thousand people waited near St Paul's and many businesses closed as a mark of respect. Even the nearby London Stock Exchange ceased trading for half an hour to allow the traders and other staff to watch the procession along Threadneedle Street. The coffins were then transported to the cemetery with around three quarters of a million people lining the route, with many people throwing flowers onto the hearses as they passed.

The Edinburgh Gazette dated 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan 1911 announced the awards of the King's Police Medal to the two wounded officers and to the three officers who lost their lives. Bryant and Woodhams had been promoted for their bravery. However their police careers soon ended; as a result of their injuries they were deemed no longer fit for duty. Sergeant Woodhams was presented with his KPM by King George V but due to his injuries he was brought before the King on a stretcher. His KPM and EdVII Coronation (Police) Medal 1902 were later presented to the City of London Police Museum. Sub-Inspector Bryant's KPM has been sold several times including three times by Dix Noonan and Webb, in Dec 2002, May 2011 and July 2015.



**SUB INSP BRYANT'S KPM**

**WHITEHALL, January 2, 1911.**

His Majesty The King has been graciously pleased to award the King's Police Medal to the following Officers of the City Police Force who took part in the attempted capture of armed burglars at Houndsditch on the 16th December, 1910 :—

William Bryant, Sub-Inspector.  
Ernest Richard Woodhams, Sergeant.

His Majesty has also graciously consented to the King's Police Medal being handed to the nearest relative of the following Officers who lost their lives on the occasion in question and who would have received the decoration had they survived :—

Robert Bentley, Sergeant.  
Charles Tucker, Sergeant.  
Walter Charles Choat, Constable.

## THE TRIAL AT THE OLD BAILEY



On 1st May 1911 the trial began before Mr Justice Grantham. Dubof and Peters were charged with the wilful murder of Charles Tucker. A second charge against Dubof, Peters, Rosen and Vassileva was of conspiracy to break and enter the shop of H.S. Harris. The case started with PCs William Poole and George Bayliss of the City of London Police producing plans and a model of the buildings for use in the trial. This model is now in the City of London Police Museum.

Isaac Levy was the only witness who identified Dubof and Peters as being the two men who carried the wounded Gardstein. None of the Police Officers present were able to place either man at the scene of the crime. On the second day of the case Mr Justice Graham commented to the counsel for the Crown that there was insufficient evidence to press the case against Dubof and Peters; consequently the murder charges were dropped. Mr Justice Graham stated 'I am strongly of the opinion that the three men who were really the chief murderers - at any rate, the men who we know were shooting - have each of them met his doom'. The three men being Gardstein plus Svaars and Sokoloff who died in the Siege of Sidney Street. The case continued on the second charge of conspiracy to break and enter Harris' shop.

MODEL USED IN THE OLD BAILEY TRIAL

Constable Frederick Smoothy was one of the officers who gave evidence at the trial. He spoke of assisting Sergeant Tucker after he had been shot. The case continued until 12<sup>th</sup> May when the jury returned a not guilty verdict for both men. Nina Vassileva was found guilty and sentenced to two years imprisonment; however this verdict was overturned on appeal. Although the main characters in this case are often portrayed as anarchists the main motivation was robbery. They undertook a very carefully planned operation and the potential rewards would have been very significant. In court Henry Harris confirmed that there was about £7,000 worth of jewellery in the safe - the current value of that sum would be £830,000.

## PC SMOOTHY'S FURTHER POLICE CAREER



On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1911 King George V was crowned at Westminster Abbey. As in 1902 this was followed by a return procession through Pall Mall, St James' Street, Piccadilly and Constitution Hill with officers from both the City of London and Metropolitan Police Forces along the route. The following day a further procession was held, passing through the Strand and into the City of London and past St Paul's Cathedral. A similar procession had been planned for King Edward VII's Coronation but was delayed several months due to the fact the King had just recovered from appendicitis. The officers of the City of London Force received the Coronation (Police) Medal 1911 with the City of London Police reverse. The records from the Met Police Receiver's Officer who outsourced the engraving (at a cost of 5d each) show the City of London Police Medals were ready for issue in December 1911. In total some 1369 silver medals were issued. Frederick Smoothy's medal is named P.C. F.W. Smoothy.

Frederick Smoothy does not appear in the 1911 Census. In late 1914 he married Francis Kathleen Herring at Uckfield in Sussex. The City of London Police had limited accommodation for married officers and from November 1914 PC Smoothy received an additional three shillings (15p) a week for Rent Aid indicating he probably had to rent private accommodation. While serving in the City of London Police the couple had two sons James and Robert, three more children were born after he left. Smoothy's police records show his rates of weekly pay; these have been tabulated and are shown here. Note the significant increase in pay in 1919 which occurred after the National Police Strike of 1918.

In 1923 Frederick Smoothy was deemed unfit for further police service and was medically retired. He was granted an annual police pension of £128 17s 08d per annum (approximately 50% of his weekly pay). He was given a Certificate of Conduct with the grade of Exemplary.

			Rent Aid
Certified fit for the Service	14.09.1900	25/-	
Pay Increase	15.11.1900	27/-	
Advanced to the 6th rate of pay	12.09.1907	28/6	
Advanced to the 5th rate of pay	18.09.1902	30/-	
Advanced to the 4th rate of pay	17.09.1903	32/-	
Advanced to the 3rd rate of pay	15.09.1904	34/-	
Advanced to the 2nd rate of pay	14.09.1905	37/-	
Advanced to the 1st rate of pay	13.09.1906	40/-	
Pay Increase	01.04.1912	41/6	
New 2nd rate of pay and Rent aid	26.11.1914	41/6	3/-
Pay advanced to the 1st rate	16.09.1915	43/-	3/-
Rent aid	23.05.1918	45/-	Nil
Pay Increased	02.09.1918	56/-	Nil
Rent aid	03.10.1918	56/-	3/-
Pay increased as from 31st Mar 1919	02.08.1919	92/6	3/-
Advanced to the 1st rate of pay	20.07.1922	95/-	3/-
Returned unfit	27.09.1923	95/-	3/-
Pension	£128/17/08		

## FREDERICK SMOOTHY'S LIFE IN HERNE BAY



After retiring Frederick Smoothy moved to Herne Bay on the North Kent Coast. The 1939 Register shows him living with his wife at 1 Sea View Square, Herne Bay; he listed his occupation as Special Constable followed by a note **Herne Bay U.D.C.** which has been added. The census shows his date of birth as 21<sup>st</sup> April 1878 although he was actually born in 1877. His son Robert, a fishmonger's roundsman and two daughters Kathleen and Patricia who were still at school are also shown at that address. After WWII Robert Smoothy followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Kent Police (No. 1687).

In WWII Frederick Smoothy served with the local ARP organisation and manned the telephones for them. For this he earned the Defence Medal to go with his two Police Coronation Medals. Frederick Smoothy died 29<sup>th</sup> January 1961 aged 83. His address was then 49 Gordon Road, Herne Bay and the probate records show his effects valued at £1260 19s 4d. Frederick's medals passed to his son Robert.

## SUMMARY AND TIDYING UP THE LOOSE ENDS

Although his group of medals are primarily those awarded to all City of London Police Officers serving at that time, they have led to an interest path of research to uncover the life of Frederick Smoothy and his involvement in one of the most serious assaults on British Police Officers. Fortunately PC Smoothy was positioned 25 yards from the entrance to Exchange Buildings. Had he been one of the uniformed officers closer to the scene he would almost certainly have been injured or killed as all five men in uniform in the roadway suffered that fate.

You might wonder how Frederick Smoothy's medals came into my possession. His son Robert worked with my father who was also a Kent Police Officer. Robert had no children and knowing my interest in medals was happy to part with the group for a relatively small sum. He didn't tell me about his father's career and it was only after another OMRS Member, Alan Clay, told me the name Smoothy was mentioned in Rumblelow's book that I realised the man whose medals I had may have been involved in this case. About ten years ago I managed to contact his son Robert again. He gave me further information about his father but sadly no longer had any photographs of him in uniform.



PC FREDERICK SMOOTHY'S MEDAL GROUP

There are many unanswered questions about the Houndsditch Murders. There are significant inconsistencies in the various reports. Who were the two men with Gardstein at No. 11 Exchange Buildings? Or were there more than two and perhaps some managed to slip away unnoticed? Various authors give names of different individuals as being involved in the murders but I have stood back from endorsing these. It is further complicated by the fact that many of the individuals had numerous aliases. I have tried where possible to stick with the names and spellings that were used for the Old Bailey Trial. A Russian immigrant (and police informer) Theodore Janson asked one of the suspects Karl Hoffman if Peters and Dubof were the murderers. He replied no and indicated there were nine men in all in the plot and Gardstein (the leader) managed it so that some of the members didn't know who the others were. It was certainly a well planned operation but rather foolhardy to try demolishing brickwork late at night when the noise would certainly attract unwanted attention.

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## RESEARCH RESOURCES

### INTERNET WEBSITES

The Proceedings of the Old Bailey  
Find My Past  
My Spitalfields Life  
Plodd in the Square Mile  
Spartacus Educational  
Wikipedia  
DNW Auction Archive

### BOOKS

The Houndsditch Murders and the Siege of Sidney Street  
Coronation and Royal Commemorative Medals 1887-1977

D Rumblelow  
Lt Cole H N Cole

### POLICE RECORDS

City of London Police Museum

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

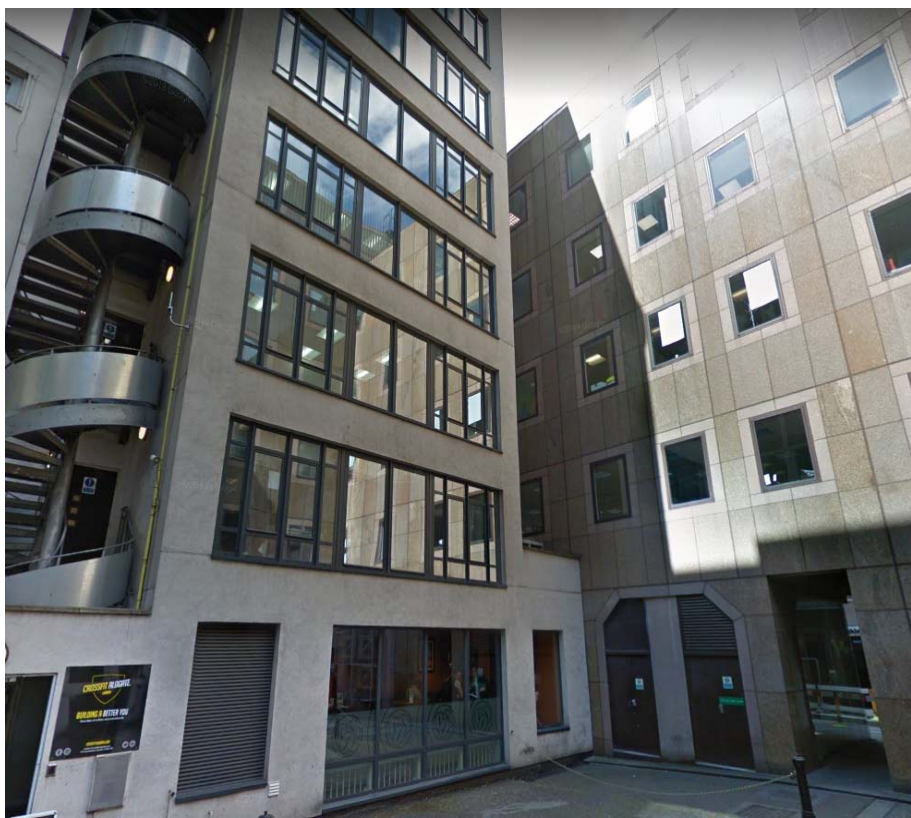
Roger Appleby Past Curator of the City of London Police Museum  
DNW for their Auction Archive  
Alan Clay OMRS Member for starting me on this research path  
Chris Bacon OMRS Member for proof reading the draft text



## POSTSCRIPT

The centenary of the Houndsditch Murders occurred in December 2010. The Commissioner of the City of London Police, Mike Bowron, unveiled a memorial plaque close to the site of Exchange Buildings. It is mounted on low wall on the corner of Cutler Street and Devonshire Square. The plaque commemorates the three City of London Police Officers who were fatally wounded on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1910. At the unveiling Mike Bowron paid tribute to the bravery of the officers.

The cul-de-sac Exchange Buildings has been redeveloped and the site where the houses Nos. 9 to 11 once stood it is now situated within an office complex (shown below) which backs onto Clothier Street. There is a passageway (on the right of the photograph below) that leads into Cutler Street.



If you go down Cutler Street and turn left it will bring you to where No. 119 Houndsditch (Harris' Jewellers Shop) was once sited. Although established in 1865 that business has long gone; the site was for many years a Costa Coffee Shop but is now a Starbucks.



No. 119 HOUNSDITCH, COSTA COFFEE SHOP



No. 119 HOUNSDITCH, STARBUCKS

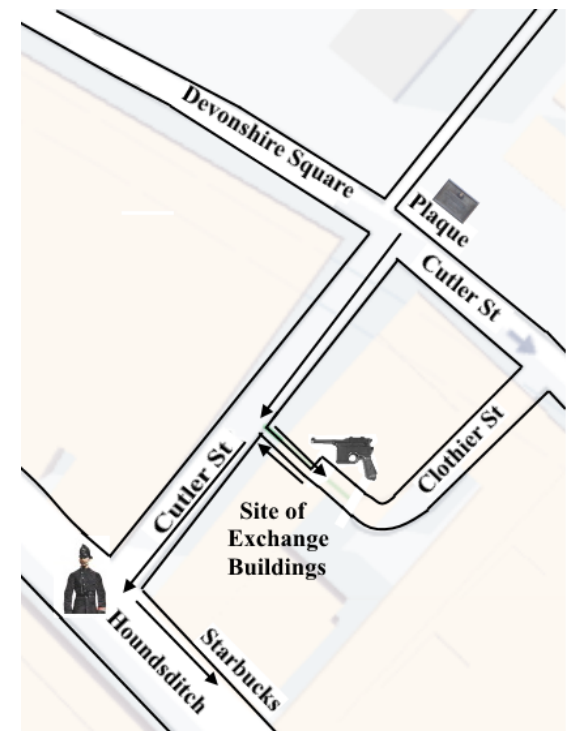
So if you get the opportunity I would recommend you visit the site. First look at the plaque on the corner of Cutler Street and Devonshire Square that commemorates Sergeants Bentley and Tucker and Constable Choate.



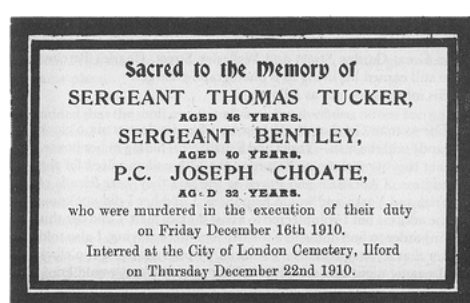
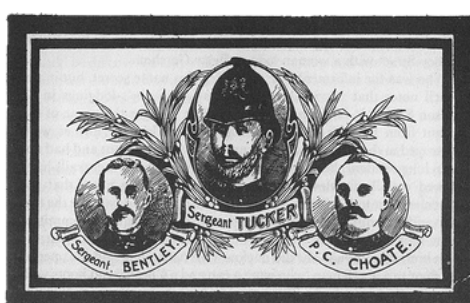
Then go down Cutler Street towards Houndsditch. Take the passageway on the left, next to Abokado's and go through into Clothier Street. The office complex on your right is the nearest you can get to the site of Exchange Buildings; spend a few moments reflecting on what happened near that place.



Then go back into Cutler Street and stop and stand on the corner of Cutler Street and the Houndsditch. I did several years and thought Constable Smoothy was standing here when the shooting started.



Afterwards you may feel like popping into No. 119 Houndsditch, Harris' Jewellers, sorry Starbucks, for a cup of coffee.



As mentioned earlier it was fortunate that PC Smoothy was positioned just 25 yards from certain death or serious injury. But with the effective collapse of the Old Bailey Murder Trial there was never any justice for the families of Sergeants Tucker & Bentley and PC Choate, whose memorial card is shown left.