

RYDE'S CHIEF CONSTABLE

Charles Greenstreet rose from humble origins as the son of an agricultural labourer to become Chief Constable of the Ryde Borough Police Force from November 1903 until his retirement in March 1922.

He was born in 1871 at "Cottage near Lilley Hole, Smeeth, Kent" and was the youngest son of Thomas and Mary Ann Greenstreet. In 1881 he was being educated at Crowborough School following which he lived with his father's cousin General John Greenstreet before, in 1890, joining the Margate Borough Police. A year later he was known to be in lodgings in Margate along with another police constable, Harry Smith. His elder brother Walter had chosen a different career path and had become a railway signalman. Charles was made a Detective in 1892 and by 1901 had been promoted to Detective Sergeant and inspector of weights and measures. At this time he was still in Margate having married Eliza Wakeley in 1894, the household being completed by a niece, Rita Wakeley. His career during this period remains something of a mystery as when following an Act of Parliament in 1943 the Margate Force amalgamated with Kent Police all their old records were sent to make new paper for the war effort.

The retirement of Superintendent George Hinks in 1903 brought Charles to Ryde as Chief Constable in charge of an establishment of 10 to 15 men. The Greenstreets took up residence at Eureka in Melville Street along with their niece but they had no children of their own. A County Press article of March 1922 reports that as part of the business of Ryde Town Council a presentation of a framed illuminated address was made to the retiring Chief Constable in the presence of the regular force and some specials. The Mayor praised his work making special mention of the efficiency of the force, the additional social work undertaken with local children during several winters up to 1914 when the force, as well as providing new boots, ran a soup kitchen and the fact that he had never been sick or had a complaint made against him during his 31 years of police service. The Mayor's praise was echoed by H M Inspector Sir Leonard Dunning. A framed photograph was presented by Sergeant Orchard on behalf of his colleagues who commented on how much conditions had improved during his tenure. The Ryde Borough Force was combined with the Isle of Wight Constabulary in 1922 .

He was a private man and apart from his official duties took no part in public affairs. An ardent Conservative he was also a Freemason and rose to be Grand Registrar of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Charles spent his retirement in the town at Highlands, Marlborough Road where he died in 1932 aged 61 having had heart problems for the last two years of his life. Eliza lived on until 1950 and both are buried in St John's Cemetery with just a modest headstone which gives no clue to their past.

Source:

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