

## INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK RUSSELL

[JA]

Right, it is Saturday the 29th of November 2025. My name's John Abrams and I'm making a recording on behalf of Whitney and District Museum Oral History Group. With me I have in the room an assistant who is...

I am Emma Moores and I work alongside John as a volunteer for Whitney District Museum and it's a pleasure to be here today. And I am introducing a man who I've known for many many years unfortunately for him. Will you tell us your name sir?

[PR]

Yes my name is Patrick Russell. And I am Jennifer Russell.

[JA]

Pat's wife. I've just known where you've lived for so long. Right, today we're going to talk about your career as a police officer and a little bit about what happened before you became a police officer.

So where were you born Pat?

[PR]

I was born in the city of Bristol in December 1940.

[JA]

And how did you get to Oxfordshire then?

[PR]

My parents seemed to have a nomadic trait for some reason because my father was only a clerk in a solicitor's office but they seemed to like moving. And we moved roughly every couple of years for some unknown reason. A lot of it was to do with housing.

They used to buy quite run-down houses and spend the time doing them up and then they could upgrade a little bit each time. So I think that's what but why so many moves and why so widespread I'm not quite sure.

[JA]

So eventually you end up at?

[PR]

I ended up yes I ended up my schooling in Oxford and they then moved to, I left school and went to work on a farm in Gloucestershire with my brother.

[JA]

Right so when did you arrive in Oxfordshire to become a police cadet?

[PR]

Yes that was, I joined the police in 1957. I left school in 1956 so I had just over a year on the farm.

[JA]

Right so what made you join the police cadets?

[PR]

Farming was a bit like slavery. I used to work for four weeks without a day off from seven o'clock in the morning till five at night out in all winds and weathers. It was a filthy heavy job and in the harvesting time we used to work until it got dark and I earned a grand sum of four pounds a week.

[JA]

So the police cadets were going to pay more were they?

[PR]

Yes I went to five pounds a week.

[JA]

So who?

[PR]

I always wanted an outdoor job.

[JA]

Yes fair enough. You were employed then by Oxfordshire?

[PR]

Oxfordshire County Council as a police cadet clerk.

[JA]

Right and where were you stationed?

[PR]

I was stationed at Bambury police station which is the older police station of the two now.

[JA]

And what was basically your various jobs as a police cadet?

[PR]

Yes it was mostly on the telephone switchboard. Every call in and out of the police station was recorded in brief, the telephone number and the person's name, what the call was about and if it was to one of the offices you had to record the office that it went to and action it connected.

[JA]

Right did you listen to the calls?

[PR]

No no no.

[JA]

Oh you have no idea what was said? What a pity. So you don't know whether they were private or police?

[PR]

Yeah no once we plugged it in that was it that was the end of it.

[JA]

So was the police station very active at that time?

[PR]

Oh very yeah very active.

[JA]

Why?

[PR]

We also dealt with public enquiries, lost and found property, found dogs, bicycles.

[JA]

Were you assisted by a policeman, a qualified one?

[PR]

There was a station duty officer with us all the time in fact it was so busy that there was quite often two cadets dealing with the switchboard which was extremely busy as you can imagine. There was a constant stream of calls in and out and often calls waiting to be answered.

[JA]

Did you have any powers as a police cadet?

[PR]  
No.

[JA]  
In addition to what you had as an ordinary citizen?

[PR]  
No just the ordinary citizens.

[JA]  
And how long were you in Banbury or did you move on from there?

[PR]  
No stayed in Banbury until I reached the age of 19 in 1959 when I went to Ensham Hall for three months initial training and then was posted to Whitney.

[JA]  
Ensham Hall where's that?

[PR]  
Ensham Hall it's now a very posh hotel we couldn't possibly afford to stay in unless you're a superstar or a multi-millionaire.

[JA]  
What was Ensham Hall like in your days? What did it consist of? Who was there?

[PR]  
It was number five district police training centre and police forces from quite a from Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Oxford City and several other forces all sent their officers for initial training courses there.

[JA]  
So when did you actually become a police officer before you'd finished training or afterwards?

[PR]  
Yes I was still a cadet technically while I was there in fact I had my 19th birthday at Ensham Hall and then was posted to Whitney where I was sworn in as a police constable.

[JA]  
So what were the subjects that you undertook at Ensham Hall?

[PR]

Oh a wide range of all the acts of parliaments. Physical training? We did physical training as well a certain amount of how to restrain people a lot of there was definitions we used to walk around with a book of definitions for example the definition of larceny which is stealing and quite a lot of the names were a bit quite Victorian but the police force itself was quite Victorian.

We still had capes we had a lamp as it was called which is a torch and bolts which were handcuffs.

[JA]

Right let's just go back to were there any ancillary training for example first aid?

[PR]

Yes we had first aid training.

[JA]

Did you have to pass an exam in that?

[PR]

Yes we had an exam in first aid yeah and a certificate.

[JA]

Did you have to learn to swim or were you a swimmer?

[PR]

I was already a swimmer but we did have swimming lessons at Cowley. We were taken up there in a minibus. I think it was about once a week.

[JA]

Right so weekly exams in law?

[PR]

Yes more or less yeah.

[JA]

And you were taught what all about the police force that you were drawing or a general term?

[PR]

Yes that's right.

[JA]

Right how long were you there three months did you say?

[PR]  
Yeah.

[JA]  
And then you got a posting to where?

[PR]  
I was posted to Whitney.

[JA]  
On the streets?

[PR]  
Yes on the streets. I was in digs which was I was earning the grand sum of seven pounds a week out of which I had to pay three pounds for my digs.

[JA]  
And which police station were you at?

[PR]  
I was at the old police station on Church Green which was built in about 1850.

[JA]  
Well you're a bit wrong there but not to worry.

[PR]  
Yeah well it was around that sort of time.

[JA]  
What was it like inside the police station? Can you actually describe the inside of the building?

[PR]  
Yeah it was a typical Victorian building obviously being modernised. There was a big coke boiler which worked as central heating system and it was almost a hanging offence to let the fire go out especially as the kettle was permanently on top of the stove so that the chap on street patrol could come in and make himself a cup of tea halfway through his shift. Otherwise you spent the whole of your eight hours out on all winds and weathers just pounding the beat.

[JA]  
Were there any police cells there?

[PR]  
Yes there was I think it was four. Four cells altogether.

[JA]

Anything else at that time because of course the motor car had only just about come in in 19. There weren't any horses or superintendents and carriages as we've heard in the past.

[PR]

No I believe that there was a garage there that I believe at one time had been used for the trap that was used by the horse and trap for the superintendent.

[JA]

Yeah well that's in the history books now. So how many shifts, what sort of shift work and when were you doing?

[PR]

Well we wrote a three shift system early shift from 6am to 2pm and we had to report quarter of an hour before duty to update ourselves with what had been going on. There was a large ledger called an occurrence book which odd things were written in there that things that had been going on.

[JA]

What sort of things?

[PR]

It could be an unusual light left on because part of our late patrol which was from 2 to 10 we used to check all the property on the high street for security any windows left open. There was a key holder's register so that if the premises were insecure or in doubt the key holder was called out.

[JA]

So where was this register maintained?

[PR]

That was in the police station.

[JA]

So it's up to the shopkeeper or the premises owner?

[PR]

Yes to make sure that he kept his key holders up to date.

[JA]

Right so you got 6 to 2, 2 to 10, 10 to 6. And how long did say an early shift last? A week, 10 days, fortnight?

[PR]

We worked seven of each shift followed by one day off and then so it was a rolling day so that by the time you got through to the weekend you had two days off as a weekend. There was no paid overtime. We had time off in lieu of overtime worked but we didn't bother to claim it because there was always a minimum requirement for manpower and they were always short so we couldn't get the time off anyway and Christmas day, boxing day, all public holidays were normal working days no extra pay for it.

[JA]

Would you like just to describe coming out the police station walking down Whitney High Street at the time what it was like?

[PR]

Yes of course the traffic conditions were much quieter than they are now. It was quite a busy typical market town and there was a market cattle market every Thursday and so the pubs were open in the afternoons on market day so the farmers could do business over a pint of beer.

[JA]

Did you have to supervise the market?

[PR]

Yes, anything that was going on we were always expected to put it make a presence known. We also used to do regular pub checks and there was another register for that to say the time you were caught. Usually you went with a sergeant and you would check for underage drinkers and there was no problems but there never really was.

There was possibly about once a month a local dance in the Corn Exchange. Again we always had to make an appearance just to show that we were around. There was no personal radios of course the only means of contact was the public telephone system which was very basic in Whitney.

You couldn't dial a number anywhere every single call even from private houses you lifted the receiver and waited for the operator to answer even to make a local call and you were put through by the operator because most people those days didn't have a phone in their houses anyway.

[JA]

I believe in actual fact your wife was a telephonist wasn't she?

[PR]

She was indeed that's how we met when I was a cadet at Banbury. We used to have to test the 999 system every morning the telephone exchange would telephone

through it was a red telephone on top of the switchboard and when that rang we had to drop everything and I took priority so it was tested every morning and the voice would say would you call me back to test please so you pick it up. One of the other cadets was engaged to one of the girls that worked on the telephone exchange and so she had a little chat with me one day and asked if I had a girlfriend and I said no and she said well would you like me to fix up the date with one of the girls and we've been married for 63 years.

[JA]

Right just describe the equipment you would have been carrying at the time a for your personal protection and anything else that how did you communicate back to the station?

[PR]

By the public telephone that was that was all.

[JA]

So you had four in your pocket?

[PR]

You had to yes well the the GPO operators were very understanding they used to put us through to the because they knew we haven't got tonnes left after out of my four pound a week left on my wages was paying for a motorbike on HP because I couldn't afford to run a car I did buy one but couldn't afford to run it so I had to sell it and bought a motorbike so out of that four pound was a pound a week going for the motorbike as well.

[JA]

So what what sort of equipment did you carry for your own personal protection?

[PR]

It was just a truncheon which was secreted in a inside long pocket down the side of the trouser leg. Did you carry a whistle? Yes we have a whistle.

[JA]

Did you ever use it?

[PR]

I did and and I drew my truncheon once I think in the hold of my service.

[JA]

Let's just here tell me can you recall what happened with the truncheon?

[PR]

I can indeed yes I think it was about 1962 yes it was I think it was 1962 I was on night shift and just before midnight the police van called a Black Mariah in those days came down the street at a rate of knots looking for me driven by a colleague of mine he said jump in the silent alarm has gone off at the Blarney cafe which is a small transport cafe on the edge of town.

[JA]

Which edge of town?

[PR]

On the Burford side of town up by Smith Industries factory. We had 15 minutes to get there before the audible alarm sounded on the premises we arrived and could see that the door was ajar and the window in the door was smashed and just caught sight of a man ducking down behind the counter at the far end of the room so I said to my colleague stay here in the van because we weren't quite sure how many people were in there I'll go in and you cut off anybody's coming out so I drew my truncheon went in and called for the man to stand up and come out he stood up and grabbed a huge knife from the knife drawer on top of the counter strangely I didn't really feel threatened it was a sort of a half-hearted movement and his body language seemed to tell me that it was just one of those things so I said don't be silly put it back and he did luckily so I handcuffed him to myself and realised that it was an escaped prisoner who'd been circulated from Gloucester prison a chap called John Henry.

[JA]

No don't tell us the name.

[PR]

Okay he was a well-known for escaping from every prison that he'd been in a prolific escapee and on actually he seemed quite a nice chap strangely enough in the van going back to the police station I was still handcuffed to him we arrived there probably getting on towards one o'clock in the morning and he explained that he'd only broken in because he'd walked from Gloucester he was starving hungry saw a cafe and hoped that he could get some food but there wasn't any so there was no restaurants in Witney in those days even the pubs didn't do food so I thought we did make him a cup of tea and I thought well his need is great.

[JA]

This was back at the police station of course.

[PR]

In the police station.

[JA]

You didn't make it in the cafe.

[PR]

No no no no this was in the police station on top of the coke boiler so I had a large sandwich box to fortify in the winter nights with doorstep bread with cheese and branched in pickle and also some jam tarts that my wife had made.

[JA]

Well you're you're married at this time?

[PR]

I was married then we just we just got married that year I believe in the August anyway so I went down to this chap's cell and sat on the bunk and shared my sandwiches and he said it was the best best tarts he'd ever had in his life.

[JA]

So you had one hand free and he had one hand free?

[PR]

No he had both hands free then.

[JA]

You said you handcuffed him?

[PR]

I did initially yeah but once he was in the cell we took the handcuffs off.

[JA]

Right but he was not two hand handcuffed?

[PR]

No just the one yeah.

[JA]

Whereas today of course yes they'd be they double handcuffed. Yeah right so that was one of your excerpts. Have you any amusing situations that happened?

Did you stay at Whitney for very long on patrol?

[PR]

I had three and a half years on the beat pounding. I enjoyed it actually. People were you got talking talking to people all the time because you were stood at the phone box for quarter of an hour every hour which the sergeant did.

[JA]  
So they could contact you?

[PR]  
So they came up to you talking to you yeah so it was a good good way of getting to know people and they knew you and they'd come up and give you snippets of information.

[JA]  
Right how far did Whitney extend in those days as far as your policing was concerned? You mentioned smiths?

[PR]  
Yes we did mostly if we covered smiths that was quite a way out in the periphery in those days so that tended to be more on a cycle patrol on the outer parts were done by an officer on a bicycle.

[JA]  
So how far west did Whitney extend roughly for you to walk?

[PR]  
Walking probably to the top of Tower Hill, Oxford Hill, up the Haley Road so keeping within the town area.

[JA]  
Really the the main road there weren't any housing estates as such?

[PR]  
No no the smiths estate was really the only estate in those days. The Haley Road estate obviously which accounts for the estate and Burwell Farm was just about being built or started to be built around that time.

[JA]  
Right so you were on the streets for three and a half years then where did you go?

[PR]  
I always wanted to get on traffic department. One of the traffic officers based at Whitney was promoted and moved to Chipping Norton and so that created a vacancy and so I'd applied for traffic and because of it I became a traffic officer working with another officer in a black Austin Westminster with the bell on the front.

[JA]  
And you were a skilled driver at that time?

[PR]

No not initially. They always crewed you with a train driver for about six minimum of six months and then you went on an advanced driving course for five weeks.

[JA]

And where did you go for that?

[PR]

Chelmsford in Essex. It was an advanced police driving school.

[JA]

And that was successful? You passed the exam?

[PR]

I got a first class certificate and thereafter every so often you'd have a two-week refresher course.

[JA]

Right so you came back to Whitney and patrolled from Whitney. How far did you go?

[PR]

There was two main routes the A40 which in those days of course carried all the London to Wales traffic because there was no motorway. So all the lorries it was a trunk road for lorries travelling between Wales and London. So it was quite a busy area not by today's standards but for the time it was busy.

So all through the night there was every few minutes probably a lorry would come through Whitney. And then the other road was the A34 which went from Oxford up to the Warwickshire boundary just north of Chipping Norton. Which is now the A44.

[JA]

Right so eight hour patrols again?

[PR]

Eight hour patrols again very similar shift pattern one day rolling day until reaching the weekend.

[JA]

Right and how active were you? Did you know the law sufficient law at the time?

[PR]

I mean yes obviously we specialised more in traffic law but we were still police officers so expected to deal with crime as well of course. So it was a mixture of the two and of course the breathalyser came in while I was on traffic.

[JA]  
And how did you administer that?

[PR]  
You get a sense of something when you look at a car that something's not quite right.

[JA]  
Oh this is your policeman's sixth sense is it?

[PR]  
We call it a policeman's nose. It is true you have a I don't know what it is but there's just a something about a way a car is being driven or the actions of the driver. Quite often people sort of put their hand up to their ear or something like that a small movement that makes you think there's something not quite right.

[JA]  
So you stop them? So you stop them yeah. And then what?

[PR]  
Take it from there.

[JA]  
Well all right what did you take it from there?

[PR]  
From a drink point of view you can usually smell alcohol. You say you then that would ask have you consumed alcohol? You could say well I can smell it on you you know so I require you to provide me with a specimen of breath for a breath test.

You weren't stopped at Ackerbilt didn't you? Yes I booked Ackerbilt for speeding in the Bentley. We used to do radar from which was work from a box initially.

[JA]  
At the side of the road?

[PR]  
On the side of the road yeah. And then of course the radar handheld guns came out.

[JA]  
That was some time later. Yeah. Any other instances while you're on traffic?

[PR]

Road accidents of course featured possibly as the main thing that we dealt with. There's a lot of fatal accidents unfortunately. So there's a lot of horror and heartbreak.

[JA]

I understand that one night you were out on patrol on the road towards Hubbingdon when something happened your attention was drawn to a stationary car.

[PR]

Yes myself and my colleague were in a Lotus Cortina patrol car at the time and we decided we'd concentrate on rural crime because even in those days there was a certain amount so the main roads are fairly quiet so we headed out towards Bampton and cross country shining our searchlight into Barnes and in case anything was untoward and we came up this was again just before midnight came across a mini car one of the original mini little car on the side of the road so we went we stopped and went to it and there was a young couple sitting in the back seat and they said that the car had broken down. They explained that they got married that day in Nottingham and they were en route to Devon for their honeymoon when the car broke down because they were in the middle of nowhere no mobile phones didn't know where the nearest phone was and the time of night there was hardly any traffic so they thought they'd have to sit it out for the night.

Well of course it was quite cold and not a very comfortable thing so we suggested we tried to get a garage to come out but they didn't want to know at that time of night so we decided said that they might be more comfortable in the police station back in Whitney so they they readily agreed to that so we brought them back to Whitney made them a cup of tea and by this time we'd moved that same year actually moved into the new police station in which year was that 68 68 yeah so all the equipment was new and amazingly enough there was no clients in any of the cells so it was suggested that they might like to spend the night in a cell we wouldn't lock them in as it was their honeymoon and so they spent their wedding night in the police station cell and they were taking a cup of tea in bed the following morning and then taken back to the car a breakdown called out for them and they found out that what the trouble was with the car sorted it and they were on their way and i believe you've stayed in contact with them i did many years later almost in fact i think it was 48 years later that there was in the daily mail there was a column people used to write about little things that they've done in their jobs or one thing and another and i wrote in about this incident and amazingly enough the young couple saw it and replied to the we we were actually away on holiday when their reply came out in the paper but the paper put us in contact with each other and we got in touch with each other but unfortunately we were going to have a reunion but unfortunately covid came along and that sort of ended that so and so there's a happy ending so they're still married they've got great great grandchildren as well good so how long were you

[JA]

traffic at whitney 22 years oh you never moved from whitney no i'd never moved from whitley

[PR]

which is unusual for a county force because generally speaking about every three years you were moved so you didn't become too familiar with the local populace i suppose but of course it got more and more expensive so that gradually fizzled out right so when did you retire 1984 and having completed how many years service 25 years pensionable service my two years cadet

[JA]

service didn't count no no well you weren't a policeman no that's right no have you any other

[PR]

stories that you'd like to tell us do you want to know horrific stories or i'm just trying to think

[JA]

of funny ones other than sharing my tarts with jenny have you anything to say at this stage not really no she's nodding her head rather than talking to us but there we are you did have those parades didn't you yes we used to have what was called a monthly meeting

[PR]

obviously every month where we had to parade at the police station and we were inspected by the superintendent and the inspector told if we needed a haircut um we had to produce appointments which was your crunching and your handcuffs and general appearance make sure we were up to scratch there was a funny thing there was one funny thing yes you had to pull your whistle out and one of the chaps who'd been on nights the night before so he had to get up especially to go there for two o'clock in the afternoon so he was a little bit sleepy still when he got to the police station he realised he hadn't got his whistle when he'd been in trouble for that so he looked around and realised that the sink plug in the canteen was very similar to a whistle chain so he took that off and stuck it in his pocket and the plug in his pocket and linked its chain to his button as was done in those days anyway the inspector was quite eagle-eyed because he stopped in front of this chap looked at it pulled it out gradually and the plug popped out he didn't say anything he just walked on to the next stop and left the plug dangling what did you do when you left the police force retire completely no no not at all i was mad on driving and strangely enough i had a real interest in heavy vehicles lorries and coaches in fact while i was still on traffic i took a driving course in psv public service vehicle got a class one licence for that and also heavy goods hcv got a class one certificate and that as well

which was quite useful in the police because on several occasions there one occasion there was a stolen earth mover giant tracked machine on the back of a low loader and it had to be kept for evidence so i had to go and drive this lorry a low loader drove it to bista to the army camp where it's kept in storage ready for when the court case came up other than that also we had radio command vehicles and so i used to be able to drive those one was the original one was an ex-army radio truck of bedford and then that was replaced by a ford with which had a demountable body that they could leave as seen somewhere but privately what were you doing when you retired when i retired initially i bought my own lorry i there was a concrete company and they used to do paving slabs and concrete product products and they wanted somebody to do the haulage because it was very seasonal so i did that for a while and in the winter um that just around the corner from where we lived there was a cattle feed mill and their winter time was very busy whereas the paving slabs were very busy in the summer so it worked in quite well uh so i was busy in the summer with the concrete products and busy with farms in the winter but unfortunately the concrete people went into bankruptcy owing me a considerable sums of money so i thought this is no good so i got a job driving and it ended up driving for a local company crusader transport driving articulated lorries all over the country which i loved actually i got to know the whole of england can go anywhere without looking at a map it did mean nights out in the lorry but um used to go up to scotland down to cornwall from wales across to the east anglia wasn't per chance any chance you were getting away from your wife at that time no not at all no no she had a lot to put up with bless her right i did have one very funny experience with that because i was returning from glasgow with a full load to go to a spice factory at tame and the police were doing a road check on lorries and they pulled me in and the civilian vehicle examiner who was employed by thames valley police was a chap i knew extremely well in fact jim fitchett in fact when he went on holiday i used to do his job because i was a vehicle examiner myself and anyway this there was this line of i pulled into this lay by and there was nothing else in there except myself in my lorry and jim was talking to two or three other officers and it came across to my lorry one of the police officers asked for my tachograph which i produced and then jim came across and took a little hammer out of his pocket that they used to tap the wheel nuts with you could tell by the sound of them whether the wheel nuts were tight or not and he started doing he didn't even look at me so i leaned out of the window and said aren't you going to speak then you miserable so-and-so well the look of horror on all these other police officers faces was something else because he looked up so it was me and we had a good laugh when did you finally put your feet up then i worked until i was nearly 70 and then i had blood clots in my lungs so you called it a day

[JA]

right let's call it a day then we've had some 70 years of policing and driving and so forth thank you very much not at all not at all uh jenny do you want to add any comment no emma any questions

[PR]

thank you we'll call it a day at that i've got a picture of me in my patrol i don't know if you've

[JA]

got this one have you john are you happy for any photo to be shared yes it doesn't say photographs on there