

OFFICIALS

The Role of the Constabulary

The day-to-day running of the Rushen Internment Camps was organised by members of the English and the Manx Constabulary. Members of the Metropolitan Police Force in London were asked to volunteer for the posts on the Island and there were many volunteers.



The recruits travelled to the Island on HMS Wolfhound (pictured left). Some of the early volunteers preferred to return to England, as the Island was too quiet for them, but those who remained, along with the replacements, stayed until the camp was closed in 1945. As the War went on, they would become fearful for

their families when the towns throughout Britain were being bombed.

WP Sergeant Ivy Baxter (right centre), who volunteered and travelled to the island in 1940, indicated that policing the Camp ran for the most part without problems.



Ivy joined the Metropolitan Police Force in 1937 and lived in Cambridge Square

Section House, where she was posted to Vine Street Police Station. In 1939, a message went round the Metropolitan Police Department asking for Women Police Officers to volunteer for duty in the Isle of Man. Ivy sent her name to Scotland Yard, where the Superintendent of Women Police at that time was a Miss Peto. After background checks, Ivy was listed for duty in the Isle of Man.

Miss Peto and the chosen officers travelled over to the Island in July 1940. Ivy had sat her promotion exam to Sergeant before leaving London and after about a month, whilst in the Island, she received a letter informing her that

she had passed the exam for Sergeant, and her “stripes” were sent to her at Port Erin. The Internees arrived, their luggage was searched by the WPCs on entry to the Camps, then they were placed under their leaders, in the closed Hotels on the Promenade. This Camp was for women internees and their children and it was surrounded by barbed wire fences.

The Red Cross obtained permission for the Internees of Port Erin and Port St Mary to work on farms and in the fish smoke house in Port Erin, under the supervision of Women Police Officers. Internees were allowed to buy small things from the grocer’s shop as most of their money had been banked. On two mornings a week, the internees received parcels and all were searched.

The German planes flew over the Isle of Man on the way to England and could be heard at night. In Ivy’s words: *“We had to scramble out of bed, dress, and round up those people who had run out of their billets. Only one bomb landed in a field nearby and it killed a donkey.”*

The Camp Commandant, Dame Joanna Cruickshank, paid several visits to London Home and Foreign Offices and during those visits Ivy was in charge of Port Erin and Port St Mary Camps, with seven WPCs and the Port Erin Constable.



Every Friday a plane arrived with the ‘pay’ for all the Camps, together with documents for the Officers in charge. Ivy and one WPC drove to all the Camps and delivered the “parcels”.

Ivy noted that many of the young Internees were unruly and the one cell of the Police Station, manned by the Constable and his wife, always had an Internee doing seven days “jail”, and in certain cases the term was extended.

During the good weather, Ivy commented: *“We had plenty of that, we took the adult women on an afternoon walk up to Colby Mountain (South Barrule), that is, those who liked the outing and behaved themselves.”*

The small cinema was closed to the public, but the Internees put their names down on the list to go to the two afternoons’ a week matinee, under escort”.

The hours of duty were long, but they had one day off a week, when they would often travel into Douglas for a look around and a good hotel pub lunch. In the summer, a curfew bell was rung on the top steps of the largest hotel, possibly the Golf Links Hotel in Port Erin, by a WPC.



Metropolitan WPSQs and local Constables

The Internees were shooed into their billets for the night and woe betide those who dived into the few back alleys and ignored the bell, as their names were listed for a spell in the police cell, which Ivy said: *“Soon stopped that little caper. I had a Defaulters Parade outside my office every morning”*.

Quite a number of women Internees, if they became ill and after treatment by the Camp Nurses, had to be taken back to England for further treatment. They had to travel by ambulance, ship and train to a UK hospital and were returned to Camp when fit enough. Ivy was usually the escort for the Internee and had to stay the night in England and travel back to Camp the next morning. Whilst there, Ivy remembered:

“On most nights, enemy planes dropped bombs and on one occasion I was literally blown out of my hotel bed, and daylight revealed a great deal of damage and injuries, but I had a hearty breakfast before returning to Port Erin, by courtesy of J. Lyons and Co. Caterers.”