

At the October meeting of **BOSHAM WI** the speaker was Sheila Willis, who gave a talk entitled **“Handbag to Handcuffs – The journey of Women Officers in the British Police Force”**.



Apart from running a pottery with her husband for 14 years and bringing up children, (both now working for the police), she explained with much humour what life was like as a women police officer in the sixties.

Her uniform at that time consisted of a skirt, shirt, jacket and she wore stockings (she had an allowance of 6 pairs per year!). Her trusty bicycle (Nellie) was with her on the beat. Householders at that time could advise the local Police Station when going away on a holiday so that those unoccupied houses could be observed by police in the owner’s absence. There were no

mobile phones or radios then, so the only way for the Station to keep in touch with the bobbies on the beat was by making a call to a public phone box where the PC would be waiting.

In the early years, Sir Nevil Macready (who was in charge of the Metropolitan Police) resisted employing women as it was very much still a ‘Man’s World’, but eventually gave way in 1919 due to much public campaigning. However, he issued the following rules:

The Height Restriction was 5’4”; *Women were barred from the service when having young children;* *There would be no pension;* *They would receive lower pay than men;* *Women couldn’t be sworn in as constables (therefore didn’t have the power of arrest).* It was still thought that a woman’s place was ‘in the home’. But things were about to change as in 1921 Gladys Moss became the first woman inspector and in 1923 women were given the power of arrest.

In the 1930s, a newspaper advertised for *“Hefty girls wanted for Police Force”, brains, good physique, must be nifty and fairly good looking*. In 1937 women were allowed to take fingerprints. In 1967 the shoulder-bag contained a pocket notebook, warrant card and a little truncheon. By 2012 women carried handcuffs, leg restrainers, sprays, video recorders, spithoods and stab vests and all this weighs about 24 lbs. Women now work alongside men as equals. 1975 saw women being allowed, at last, to wear trousers, but only on night duty.

2003 saw the introduction of women Community Officers and Sheila subsequently served as one for 10 years. These days women can be trained and involved in every area of the force and more than 15% of the 46 UK forces, including British Transport Police, are now headed by a woman. Sheila touched on some very popular television police series by playing their theme tunes, such as Dixon of Dock Green, The Gentle Touch, Juliet Bravo, The Bill, Prime Suspect, Scott & Bailey, Happy Valley, Line of Duty, Unforgotten.

Bosham WI will be meeting on **Wednesday, 6th November at 2.30pm at Bosham Village Hall** and everyone would be welcome to hear Terry Timblich – Desert Island Discs. For further information please look at the website www.boshamwi.co.uk

Jennifer Fidler