

Superintendents 6 - high flying Supt Charles Keel

As with several of our Superintendents, **Charles Keel** had humble roots but worked his way up through the system. Unlike his predecessors, Charles joined the West Riding Constabulary well after it was established in 1857 and only stayed in Settle for a few years. Newspaper articles usually give a good summary of the careers of Superintendents but Charles was difficult to track. At times, it seemed that there may have been more than one Superintendent Keel. However, it transpired that Charles, being an ambitious man, chose to move very regularly to work his way up the ladder in record time.

After working in Middlesborough as a clerk for his father, an ironmaster, Charles joined the West Riding constabulary in 1887 when he was 21, the minimum age for entry. He was posted to Sheffield as a drill instructor, and then to Wakefield and Doncaster as a clerk, all in the space of two years. In 1892 he was promoted to the rank of Sergeant back in Sheffield for five years. In 1897 he became an Inspector at Hillsborough. 1897 was the year that the vacancy for Superintendent in Settle arose after *'the accidental death of Superintendent Thomas Blanshard, a fatal accident whilst out shooting with a fellow Superintendent'*[1].

Captain Russell, the Chief Constable at Sheffield said Inspector Keel had been *'of the greatest service and would leave a vacancy it would be hard to fill. It only showed that a man, by assiduous good conduct and by not sparing himself when there was any work to be done could attain any rank in the Force. It was the first time in [Captain Russell's] experience of 30 years where an officer had reached the rank of Superintendent after such a short term of service as eleven years. Mr Keel was now only 32 years of age and had attained the highest rank in the Force which was one to him'*.

had been of the greatest service, and he would leave a vacancy which it would be hard to fill. It only showed that a man by assiduous good conduct and by not sparing himself when there was any work to be done, could attain any rank in the Force. It was the first time in his (the speaker's) experience of 30 years where an officer had reached the rank of Superintendent after such a short term of service as eleven years. Mr. Keel was now only 32 years of age, and had attained the highest rank in the Force which was open to him.—The Bench were very

In October 1902, after five years in Settle, Charles left to become the Superintendent at Sowerby Bridge and was replaced in Settle by **Superintendent Hicks** of Sowerby Bridge! From there he went to the Claro division of Ripon and Pateley Bridge and finally, in 1912 moved to East Morley in Bradford. The only disappointment for his CV was in 1907. On more than one occasion that year Charles was recommended by a sub-committee to the West Riding Standing Joint Committee to take the post of the West Riding Deputy-Chief Constable but, for some reason, this was rejected each time [2].

STILL AT A DEADLOCK.
The West Riding Deputy-Chief Constable-ship.
At a meeting of the West Riding Standing Joint Committee at Wakefield to-day a long discussion took place in reference to the appointment of a deputy-chief constable of the West Riding in succession to Mr. Smith Gill, who retired a few months ago. The sub-committee submitted the names of Superintendents Quest, Keel, and Symonds, with a recommendation that Superintendent Keel be appointed. The recommendation, however, was rejected. Therefore matters are still at a deadlock.

Charles retired in 1916, after nearly 30 years in service, aged 50. The article celebrating his retirement explained he had *'a commanding figure and forceful personality'*[3]. It transpired that *'On many occasions [Superintendent Keel] has acted in various capacities in connection with Royal Visits, and*

When he was promoted to the rank of superintendent he was the youngest man who had ever held that rank in the West Riding. He was in charge of the police at the first flying meeting ever held in this country—at Doncaster, in October, 1909. On many occasions he has acted in various capacities in connection with Royal visits, and in 1912 was one of a number of chief officers of police presented to King George at Wentworth. Supt. and Mrs. Keel have one daughter and one son, Second-Lieut. Edgar Keel, who is serving at the Front, and who was recently reported to have been wounded.

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in 1912 was one of a number of chief officers of police presented to King George at Wentworth.' Wow! Charles had also had the honour of being in charge of the the police response at 'the first flying meeting ever held in this country — at Doncaster in October 1909' [ph1]. This was the first substantial aviation display following the historic Channel crossing by Louis Bleriot and, with crowds up to 60,000 in number, a police presence was required. The aviation displays far more dangerous in those days and so, being safety minded, at another event, Charles took numerous motorists to court for leaving their cars unattended to see the competitors for periods of fifteen minutes up to three and a half hours! The Chairman decided that, although there was a very serious obstruction on the road, the circumstances were very peculiar and so the motorist just paid costs, without being fined! [4]



OBSTRUCTION BY MOTORISTS.
▲ HARROGATE INCIDENT DURING THE FLYING RACE.

Reports of the work of other Superintendents give a good representation of 19th century policing but, as we have seen, Charles' work demonstrated some great social history too. Whilst in Settle Charles' report to the magistrates about local hostelries, 'Brewster Sessions', in 1889 stated that that 23 of the 38 people licensed to sell alcohol actually ran drinking establishments and 'The Ashfield Hotel was conducted on the principles of a Temperance Hotel'. The Ashfield was the first of many to appear in the streets of Settle over the following years [5].

In 1901 Charles crossed paths with **Charles Penvose**, **John Duckworth** and **Albert Heaton** and took them to court for poaching. He said 'these men practically got their living by systematic poaching', and he pressed for a substantial penalty. 'There were several convictions against Penvose, the other two had absconded'. Penvose was fined 30 shillings plus costs, the others £1 and their nets etc confiscated [6]. A year later, **William Ecclestone**, the marine store dealer (rag and bone type dealer) at The Folly was fined for being drunk and disorderly, as was **John Smith** aka 'Happy Jack' who was also violent. Superintendent Keel said that when Smith was at the [police] station he was 'mad drunk'!

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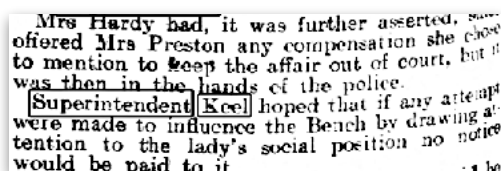
Drunks—William Eccleston, marine store dealer, Settle, for being drunk and disorderly at Settle, on Sunday, the 6th inst., was fined 2s. 6d. and costs 6s. 6d.—John Smith, alias "Happy Jack," for being drunk and disorderly on the 19th inst., was fined 5s. and

Speed limits for the new motor cars were much lower at the turn of the century, for obvious reasons. In 1903, in Knaresborough, Superintendent Keel took a motorist to court for speeding. Charles, need off duty, was travelling on a train to Boroughbridge and saw **Major Stapylton** of Myton Hall driving along a road. By timing how long it took for the Major to reach Boroughbridge he was able to calculate that he must have been driving at 19 mph and the speed limit was 12mph! [7] Sneaky! Charles was clearly of the opinion that class should never prevent justice and the Major was fined £5.

Yesterday, at Knaresborough, near Harrogate, penalties were imposed on motorists for exceeding the twelve miles an hour limit, which amounted to a total of £37. Superintendent Keel, when travelling in the train, saw Major Stapylton, of Myton Hall, driving on the Ferrensby-road. He arrived at Boroughbridge before the major, whom he met motoring into the town, and charged him with covering four miles 1,364 yards in 15 minutes, or at the rate of 19 miles an hour.—Fined £5 and costs.

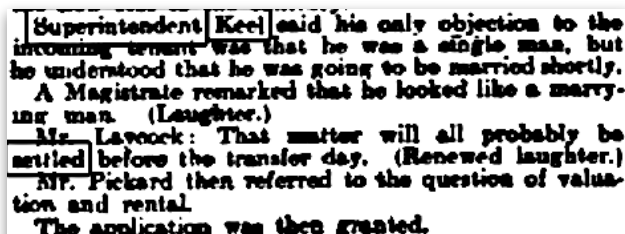
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Cases involving the upper classes were regarded as sensational and so newspaper reports loved them! Supt Keel's most widely publicised case, nationally, featured a similar class of criminal! In 1909 a *'Society Woman's Theft — a remarkable incident at Harrogate'* was published. Mrs **Elizabeth Branson Hardy** was the widow of a senior officer in a *'crack regiment'* — these were elite, highly skilled, and experienced military units. Mrs Hardy also had parliamentary connections. She had been staying in one of the best hotels in Harrogate but was taken to court by an antique dealer for stealing a miniature silver tankard worth 25 shillings and she *'drove off in a hired landau'*. It transpired suspicions had previously been raised and she was being observed by an Inspector's wife, **Mrs Arundel** who saw it all. In the small world of the West Riding Constabulary, Superintendent Arundel served in Settle at the time of the 1911 census! Mrs Hardy offered to return the tankard and pay £4 to keep it out of court. Superintendent Keel was having nothing of it and *'hoped that if any attempt were made to influence the Bench by drawing attention to the lady's social position no notice would be paid to it'* [8]. Mrs Hardy's doctor said it was possible she had been subjected to a sudden mental aberration but he was privately employed by her, so he would say that! She was fined £5 plus costs.



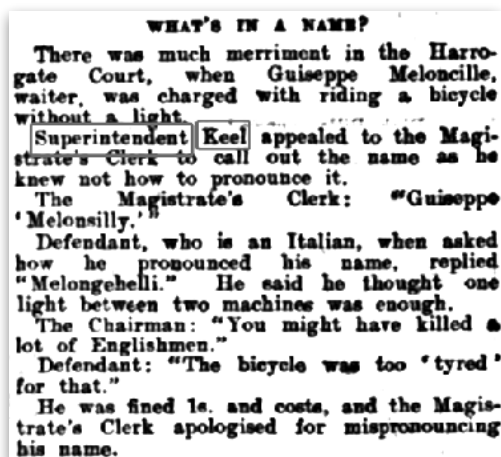
Mrs Hardy had, it was further asserted, offered Mrs Preston any compensation she chose to mention to keep the affair out of court, but it was then in the hands of the police. Superintendent Keel hoped that if any attempt were made to influence the Bench by drawing attention to the lady's social position no notice would be paid to it.

In 1905 Superintendent Keel made us aware of licensing laws — did you know there was an expectation for landlords to be married men? A man had applied to take on the tenancy of an inn and *'Superintendent Keel said his only objection to the incoming tenant was that he was a single man, but he understood that he was going to be married shortly. A Magistrate remarked that he looked like a marrying man. (Laughter.) Mr. Laveock: That matter will all probably be settled before the transfer day. (Renewed laughter.) Mr. Pickard then referred to the question of valuation and rental. The application was then granted.'* [9]. This caused a bit of hilarity in court when the Magistrate remarked that he looked like a marrying man!



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In 1911 Charles made a slightly humiliating arrest when **Guiseppe Meloncille**, an Italian waiter, was charged with riding a bicycle without a light. Unfortunately, he didn't know how to pronounce the man's name so, rather than asking the man himself, asked the magistrate's clerk to read his name for him. He decided on *'Guiseppe Melonsilly'*!! This provided 'much merriment in the Harrogate Court! The defendant said his surname should be pronounced *'Melongehelli'* — does that help? The defendant, a bit of a comedian, also said his *'bicycle was too tyred'* to kill people and was fined just 1 shilling [10].



WHAT'S IN A NAME?
There was much merriment in the Harrogate Court, when Guiseppe Meloncille, waiter, was charged with riding a bicycle without a light. Superintendent Keel appealed to the Magistrate's Clerk to call out the name as he knew not how to pronounce it. The Magistrate's Clerk: "Guiseppe 'Melonsilly.'" Defendant, who is an Italian, when asked how he pronounced his name, replied "Melongehelli." He said he thought one light between two machines was enough. The Chairman: "You might have killed a lot of Englishmen." Defendant: "The bicycle was too 'tyred' for that." He was fined 1s. and costs, and the Magistrate's Clerk apologised for mispronouncing his name.

What do we know about the personal life of this high-flying superintendent?

When Charles was 26, he married **Helen Ann Kirkwood**, an engine fitter's daughter and a year later they had the first of three children. Daughter **Ida Keel** married a fur retailer, **George William Morley**, and they had one daughter. Charles and Helen Ann's son, **Edgar Keel** became a textiles salesman. Ida and Edgar lived near each other in Knaresborough and Harrogate. Charles and Helen Ann's eldest son, **William Keel**, joined the navy in Hull when he was just 15. Tragically William died

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while bathing in New York harbour three years later. It was his fourth voyage to America as an apprentice on the Steam Ship Toronto. Superintendent Keel received the news by cable [11].

Superintendent Keel, of the Harrogate, Ripon, and Knaresborough constabulary, yesterday received news by cable of the drowning of his son, William Keel, while bathing in New York Harbour. The son was making his fourth voyage to America in the s.s. Toronto, one of Wilson and Sons' boats.

Superintendent Keel died on 30 December 1925, aged 59 when he was living in Shipley. Helen Ann moved to live near her son and daughter in Knaresborough and Harrogate.

As we know, Charles had humble roots and the police service provided a route to better things. Charles was the fourth child of **Jonathan Keel** and his wife **Elizabeth Bainbridge**. Jonathan joined the ranks of men working as coal miners in and around Middlesbrough. Superintendent Keel's eldest brother was **William Keel** [ph2]. William married **Elizabeth Longson** from Stalybridge and they had six children, living back in Middlesbrough. At the time of census returns William listed his occupation as an engine fireman, engine driver and stationmaster's assistant, but he was so much more.



William's grandson, via his son **Charles William Keel**, a bookbinder, was another **William Keel**. This William [12] served with the local Red Cross for many years and then entered the Mercantile Marine and became the second engineer and the Engine-room Artificer by the age of 24. This was a highly skilled technical role. He was serving as part of a 1,000 strong crew on *HMS Royal Oak* in the early days of WW2. On 14 October 1938 the ship was part of a fleet trying to find a German ship but got left behind in Scapa Flow off the island of Orkney. A German submarine managed to get within range and launched torpedoes, several of which hit the *Royal Oak*. 834 members of the crew died, including William and 100 boy-seamen under the age of 18 undergoing training. The last sentence of the article about William's death casually mentioned that *'the Keel family is well-known in Middlesbrough. Mr William Keel, grandfather of ERA Keel having been a magistrate for the borough'*.

The Keel family is well-known in Middlesbrough. Mr. William Keel, grandfather of Engine Room Artificer Keel, having been a magistrate for the borough.

So, grandfather William Keel was a magistrate! In 1911 William gave his approval for the erection of a statue of **Sir Samuel Stanley Sadler** [13], a British industrialist who had recently died. Sir Samuel was a chemist and, after studying with **Michael Faraday**, established the successful chemicals business of Sadler and Company Limited based in Middlesbrough – Teesside's first oil and chemicals company and the leading centre of the chemicals industry in the UK. He also owned a colliery and became the first Conservative Member of Parliament for Middlesbrough. William said *'his distinctive personality impressed itself upon all. If you saw him, even without speaking to him, it always seemed to do you good'*.



After his funeral in 1936, William's obituary explained he had been a Middlesbrough Magistrate for 40 years. He worked his way up through the LNER staff roles, starting as a shed boy and reaching the position of foreman [14]. He was appointed as JP in 1893 when he was a member of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants.

A Middlesbrough Magistrate for 40 years, he came to Tees-side when a boy. He began work as a shed boy on the L.N.E.R. and rose to the position of foreman before retiring in 1922, when he went to live at Marske. He was prominently connected with the Baptist Church at Middlesbrough and Marske Parish Church.

