

THE MURDER OF PC GEORGE CLARK, 1846

Part 1 of 4: Introducing the George Clark case

George Clark, only 20 years old, fell victim to one of Victorian England's most notorious unsolved murders. He was brutally killed while on night duty at Eastbrookend in Dagenham on the evening of 29th or morning of the 30th June 1846, and buried in the parish churchyard of St Peter & St Paul, Crown Street.

Dagenham parish church and churchyard. The memorial on George Clark's grave is the white obelisk in the foreground



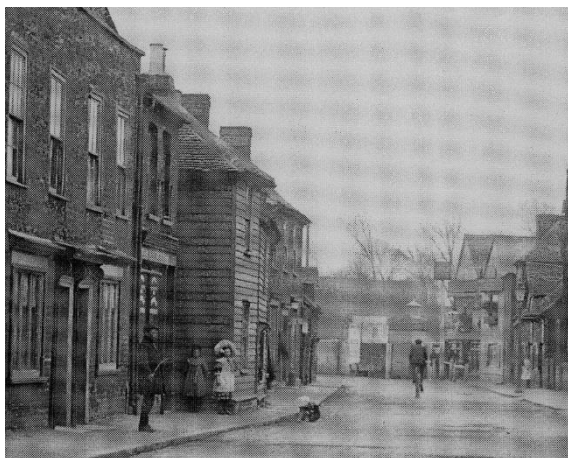
His early life

George Clark was born in 1826 in the village of Battlesden in Bedfordshire to James Clark and Charlotte (née Ashpole). He had two younger sisters, Ann and Mary, with another sister sadly dying in infancy.

On leaving school George worked as an agricultural labourer, but the pay and prospects were not good and he applied to join London's Metropolitan Police. Candidates had to be under 30 years old, at least 5 feet 7 inches tall, able to read and write and to pass a medical examination. He was enrolled on 2 June 1845, with the warrant number 22098 and collar number K313. He was assigned to K Division, and for the first eleven months he lived and worked at the divisional headquarters at Arbour Square, Stepney.

Arrival at Dagenham

On Friday 15 May 1846 George Clark and two other constables were transferred to Dagenham. They were replacing three men, Robert Greaves, Timothy Hayes and James Oliver, who had been dismissed for a drunken violent rampage through Dagenham Village.



The Dagenham force consisted of a sergeant, William Parsons, and six constables. Apart from Clark, these were Abia Butfoy, Thomas Kimpton, Isaac Hickton, John Burnside Farnes and Jonas Stevens. Clark and Stevens would share a room at the police station, an old house in Bull Street with a stable for one horse and a weatherboard lock-up for miscreants. Sergeant Parsons, his wife Maria and their baby daughter also lived there.

Left: Bull Street, showing the weatherboarded police station behind the two little girls (LBBB Archives at Valence House)

George Clark was a staunch Methodist and in the habit of distributing religious tracts while on his beat. He attended the newly-built Ebenezer Chapel, almost opposite the police station.

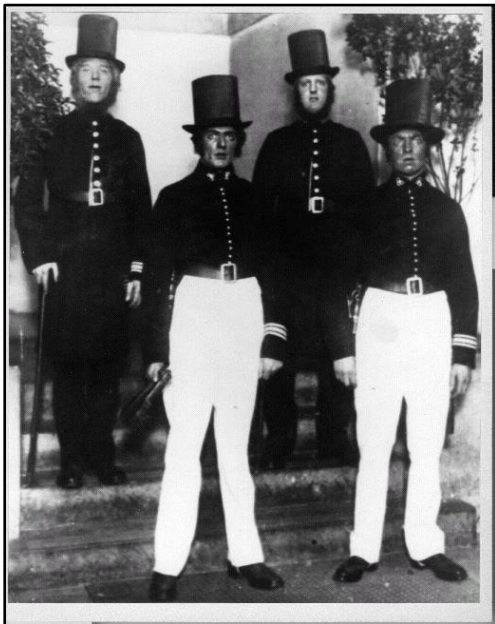
On the day before he was murdered, Clark actually took a service when the circuit preacher failed to arrive. Ominously, he ended by telling the congregation "Perhaps we may not all meet again in this world, but if not, God be with you".



Bull Street, with the Ebenezer Chapel on the far right. The police station can be seen on the left behind the lady with the bicycle (*LBBD Archives at Valence House*)

Clark's working life

Clark wore a blue serge swallowtail coat with brass buttons. It had a high-standing collar measuring 2 inches, under which was a leather stock to protect his neck from attack. He was issued with a blue great-coat with a cape attached. The trousers were also blue, but with the option of a white pair in summer. Clark would also have worn a leather belt about 4 inches wide. His headgear was a black top hat made of felted beaver fur, with a cane frame and topped with leather (the familiar police helmet wasn't introduced until 1864). The regulation sturdy leather boots were notoriously uncomfortable.



Clark would have done some spells of work during the day, such as manning the front desk at the police station, but his main duty was to patrol his beat during the night. He was given a bullseye oil lantern to light his way. He also carried a wooden rattle (similar to those familiar to football fans in days past) to raise the alarm if need be. To defend himself he had a truncheon (also known as a staff), and he also carried a cutlass when on night duty.

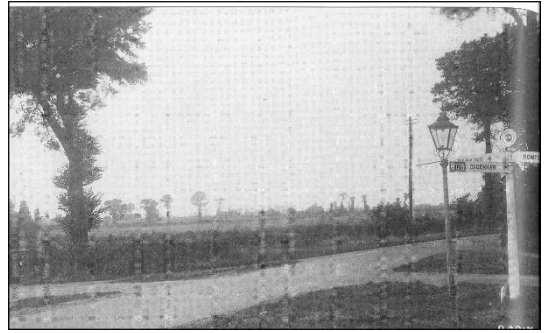
Unfortunately there is no known photograph of George Clark. This is a group of early policemen, two of whom are wearing the summer uniform of white trousers. One is holding a rattle (*courtesy of Glamorgan Record Office*)

Clark's beat

George Clark was allocated the Eastbrookend beat (see map below for full details). He would patrol on foot and alone between 9 at night and 6 in the morning.

The starting point was the Four Wantz crossroads, a mile north of Dagenham Village. Clark would first have struck eastwards along what is now Dagenham Road, through Eastbrookend towards Rush Green. He took a detour along a track now known as the Chase to check on Hooks Hall Farm.

At Fels Farm he turned back, retraced his steps to the Four Wantz and then headed along Tanyard Lane (now Rainham Road North). He turned left into Frizlands Lane, down to Oxlow Lane and back to the Four Wantz.



The Four Wantz junction, where Clark's beat began (*LBBB Archives at Valence House*)

Hooks Hall Farmhouse (*LBBB Archives at Valence House*)

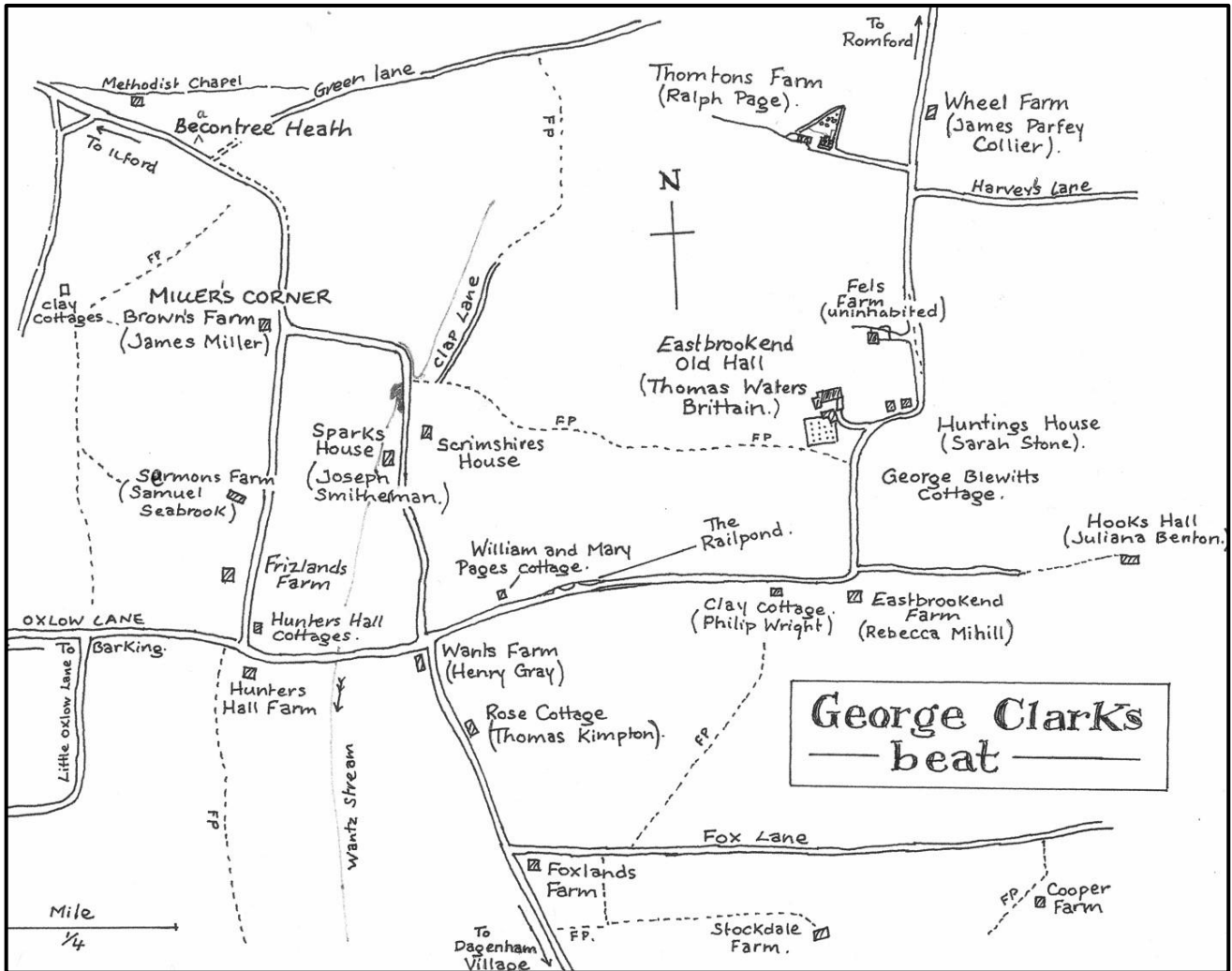


A circuit of this beat took an hour and a half. The route took him along lonely country lanes, not much more than cart tracks, with deep ditches on either side. Clark was expected to check security at the various farms and outbuildings along the route. At regular intervals Clark would meet Sergeant Parsons, who rode on horseback around each beat to check on the men and pass on reports.



Clark would have passed this ancient clay cottage in Dagenham Road (*LBBB Archives at Valence House*)

On Monday 29 June 1846, Clark had been in Dagenham for just over six weeks. That night he set off on his beat as usual. But at 6am the next morning, he failed to return to the police station.



Map showing a reconstruction of Clark's beat (drawn by Lee Shelden)

See also:

- Part 2: Brutal and shocking killing
- Part 3: The murder investigation
- Part 4: George Clark remembered

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