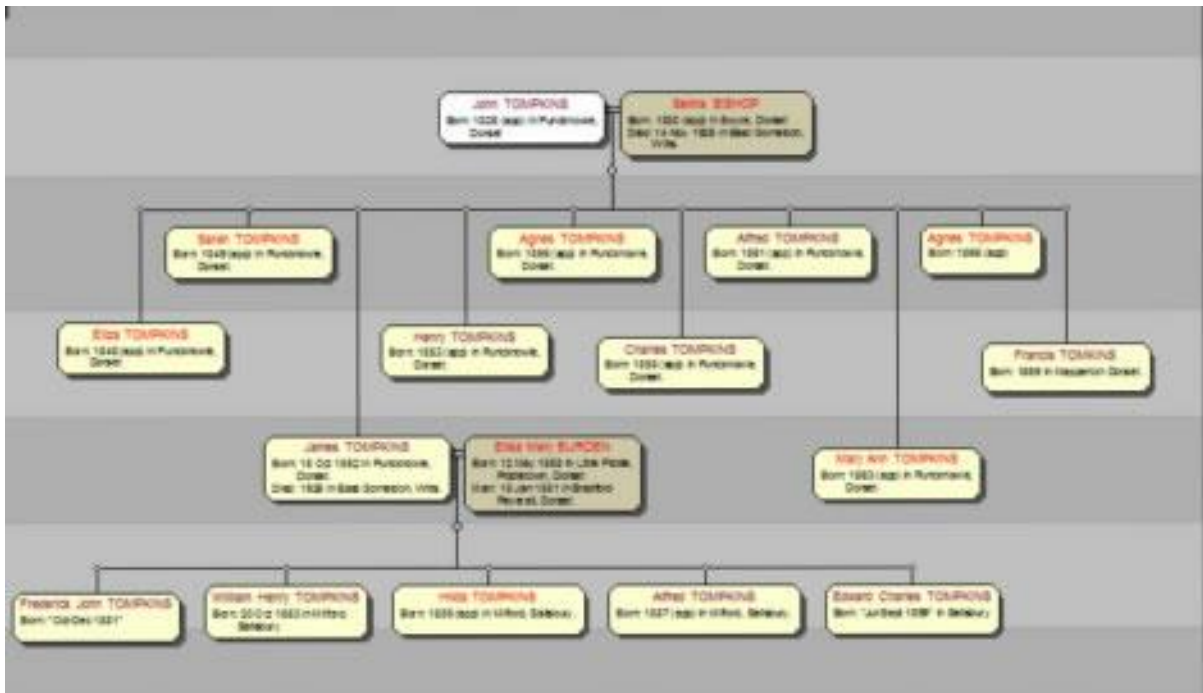


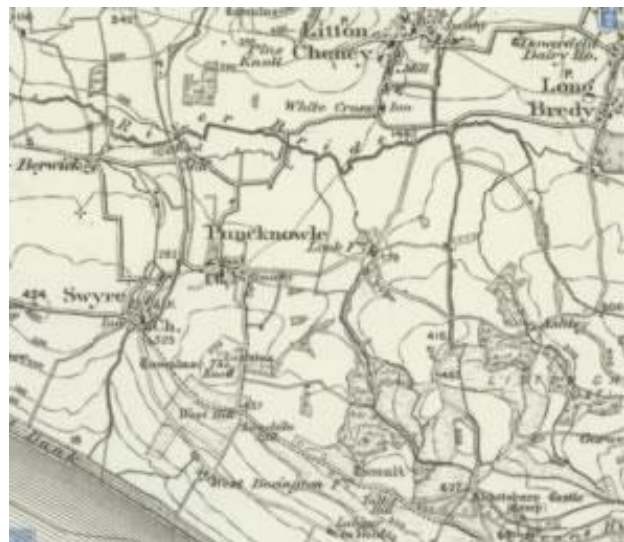


## James Tomkins Police Constable in Wiltshire

### The Immediate Family of James Tomlins



James Tomkins was born on the 18th September 1852. He was the third child and first son of John and Selina Tomkins (née Bishop), who lived in Punctknowle, Dorset. Punctknowle is a coastal parish about 6 miles south-east of Bridport. Punctknowle Knoll is a steep rocky hill on the coast which has for centuries served as a landmark for mariners. The parish covers an area of 2040 acres of land and 120 acres of water and foreshore.



A Parochial School was built in 1851 for 130 children and the population in 1891 was 427 persons. Swyre, where Selina was born is an adjacent village with a population of 277 in 1871. James probably attended the newly built Parochial School.



He started out in life working as an Agricultural Labourer in Godmanstone is a small village in West Dorset, lying to the south of Cerne Abbas, and 5 miles north of the county town of Dorchester, He was working just 3½ miles from home. In his early twenties he married Eliza Mary Burden at Bradford Peverell in Dorset (just north west of Dorchester,) and about this time decided to join the police force.

← Bradford Peverell Parish Church

There is a possibility he had previously been with the Metropolitan Police Force and later became a Constable in the City of Salisbury Police Force. A possible scenario is that he didn't like the big city and had the opportunity to move to a more rural appointment which was nearer his birth place and family.

His move to Salisbury took place sometime before December 1881 with the family living at 22 College Street, Salisbury, a walkable distance from his Station in Endless Street. The house although narrow was a good length and had quite a large garden. It was in a nice area with two public parks nearby.



The House in College Street →



← James wife Eliza Mary was born on the 12th May 1858 in Little Piddle, Piddletown, Dorset. Her parents were John and Jane Agnes Burden. John was born in either 1812 or 1816 in Tarrant Launceston, Dorset and Agnes was born about 1817 in Stoke Wake, Dorset.

Early on in their marriage Eliza May described herself as a 'policewoman' in a national census. Up until the 1920's the wives of constables often helped out with women prisoners and children in trouble and were a great asset to the force.

As so often happened in those days other members of the family joined the profession of someone who had made the initial step. James had two other younger brothers also serving in the Police.

Charles Tompkins was a Police Officer in London in Metropolitan Police (In the 1891 Census he is shown as residing at a Westminster Section House) in 1891.

Also, at this time, if one member of a family improves himself by securing a better job then others followed, one big attraction in this case was the starting up of a police pension. James had two other younger brothers also serving in the Police. Charles was a Police Officer in London in Metropolitan Police having joined on the 30th January 1882. His warrant number was 66248. In the 1891 Census he is shown as residing at a Westminster Section House. He served on 'A' Division reputedly where the smartest Police Officers served. He retired on the 3rd February 1908 aged 46 years

having served 26 years in the Force.

Another brother, Henry Tompkins was a Police Officer in Somerset . He is shown as joining the Chard Borough Police in March 1886 aged 34 years. He is also in the position in the 1891 and 1901 census.

Of the children of James and Selina, son, Alfred James Tompkins also joined the Police, serving at Chatham Naval Docks during 1918. Like his father he joined the Metropolitan Police on 17th February 1913. His warrant number was 102372 and collar number was 966 'Y'. He may have been 'seconded' to Chatham for the War. He appears to be back in the Metropolitan Police in 1920.

Another relative, on James mothers' side, also joined the Police. Henry John Bishop joined the Metropolitan Police on 11th February 1901. His warrant number was 87096. He served on 'S' Division at Hampstead. He was dismissed on 2nd August 1919, this is the time of the Police strike when 500 Metropolitan Police Officers were dismissed for withdrawing their labour and refusing to patrol.

Meanwhile 'father' James Tomkins was working in Salisbury still living in College Street. In the 1881 Census, James mother, Selina and two sisters, Agnes and Francis Tompkins are shown as being at 22, College Street probably as residents but may have been visiting on the day of the census.

In 1883 PC James Tomkins of the Salisbury City Police was involved in an incident at Salisbury Cathedral, where on 18th April, when a suspect package was left at the door of the cathedral, which he found when patrolling his beat. Scotland Yard became involved because of the seriousness of the incident, which was judged to have been a hoax. This incident is fully reported in the Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette on 19th April, 1883.

The national census of 1891 shows James and his family still living in 22 College Street as were two other police constables P.C. Stephen Coombs at number 24 and P.C. George Bond at number 26. In the later part of the 1800's local constabularies were starting to purchase houses for their married staff and the grouping here suggests that they were living in police accommodation. This had advantages both to the force and the men. The men had security and the force had control about who was living where. At the time of the horrendous train crash at Salisbury railway station in 1906 a later enquiry found that one of the factors in saving the lives of the injured was the fact that the police all had bicycles and arrived quickly on the scene. In November 1903 a new Chief Constable had been appointed, Ernest Frank Richardson. In a unique situation he already had a father who was a Chief Constable (Hereford) and a brother (Halifax) plus three brothers of lower ranks in the force.

Frank Richardson was to stay with the Salisbury Police until his retirement in 1929 attesting the first Policewoman to have equal status as male constables, Mildred White, in 1918. He employed James Tompkins, son of Edward Charles, as a 'garden boy' at one time.



Unlike many other forces the Salisbury police were always keen to have their photographs taken. This photograph shows James Tompkins (standing) on the steps of the Guildhall in 1895 in a group photograph.

The City Force 1905 →



This photograph of James Tomkins is a close up and was abstracted from the City Police Phot of 1905.

Sometime after 1905 and before 1911 James Tomkins retired. He and Elisa Mary moved to the village of Gomeldon six miles north of Salisbury. Gomeldon was a small village with just a few of life's essentials. Pub, post office, grocery store and bakery very much like Punchknowle so perhaps that was the attraction to move there.

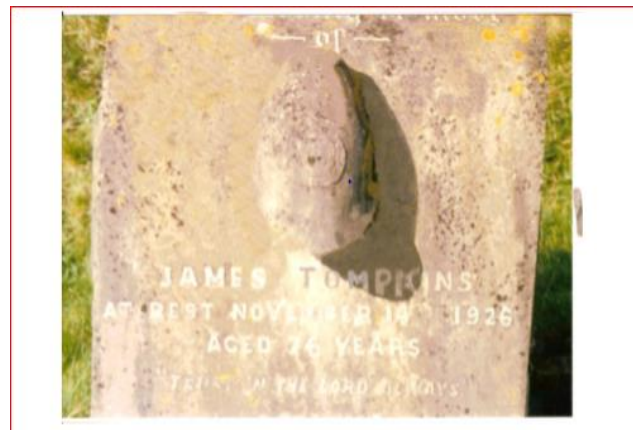


James and Elisa Mary in their retirement years at East Gomeldon.

Below is an OS map of circa 1890 showing Gomeldon and Porton villages. There is a steep sided ridge between the two. The church at Porton where they are buried is just visible.



James died on the 14th November 1926 and was buried at St. Nicholas Parish Church, Porton. Eliza Mary lived until 1941 and is buried with her husband at Porton.



In one of life's co-incidences: the grandson of Frank Richardson lived with his parents in Porton village practically next door to St. Nicholas Church in the first half of the 1950's having previously lived (1940's) very close to Edwin Andrews who retired to Somerset Road, Salisbury.