

## A London police station in 1939

Notes from an interview with Ted Willis.

The policeman's torch would be masked, leaving a pinpoint of light or a pencil beam.

The police station's blue lamp would be lit. (Watch a video of the TV show *The Blue Lamp*?)

Inside there would be a public counter. There would sit a senior Sergeant, whose attitude would vary from helpful to unpleasant depending on how he felt. Next to him would be a young Pc in training. Also in the hall would be 2 benches with no backs for the public to sit on while waiting. At night there would always be half a dozen people sitting on these benches, probably waiting for people who were being "banged up" or charged.

Opposite the counter would be the Detention Room, like a cell but not as bad. This would be used for holding people who had been arrested but not yet charged.

Behind the counter, or through another door off the hall, would be a small charge room, with a square table and two chairs. The Pc would bring the prisoner in then stand with his back to the door. The Sergeant would charge the prisoner. He might read the charge formally, or he might say: "I can't be bothered with all this, you're nicked," and the prisoner would probably say "Okay, Sarge."

The CID would be upstairs.

In the basement would be 6 cells: each a tiny room maybe 8' by 12' with a plank bed, a grey blanket and a bucket. (Ted once saw palliases in a police station outside London.)

The standard breakfast would be a cup of weak tea and a slice of bread with margarine. However, some prisoners would have breakfast brought in by their wife or mother, and others who had money would tip the Pc to fetch bacon and eggs from a cafe nearby.

The Sergeant had the discretion to grant bail in minor cases. He would require evidence of a fixed address, such as an envelope or a bill or a rent book. In those circumstances bail might be granted on the prisoner's own recognizance. If the charge were more serious the prisoner might phone his landlady and ask her

to come in with the rent book.

The prisoner would either spend the night in the cells or be bailed to appear at 9.30 in the morning. Magistrate's Court would start at 10. The prisoner might then persuade the magistrate to grant bail, but if the charge involved valuable property bail might be set in the sum of £50 or £100. Then the prisoner would have to have someone come to the police station with the money before he would be released.

If Harry is brought to the nick by Fiona's brothers, he could not be charged until the restauratuer arrived.

Once Margaret had enlisted with the ATS her father could not get her out provided she is over 18. Under 18 she needs signed permission.