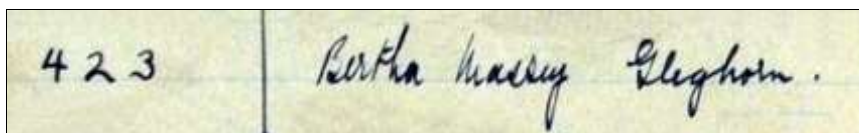


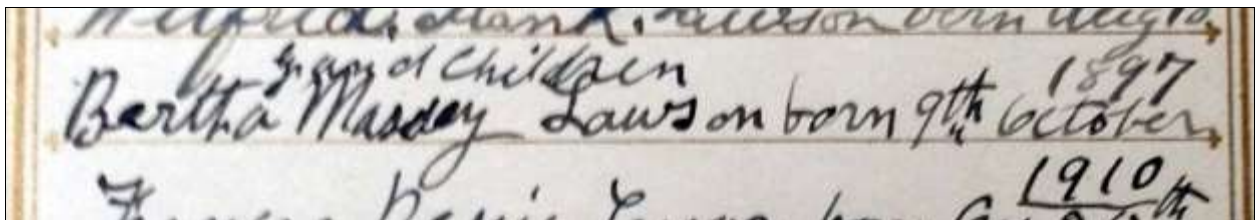
**WOMAN POLICE CONSTABLE BERTHA MASSEY GLEGHORN**  
**Metropolitan Police 'C' Division, Warrant No. 423, Collar No. 128MP.**  
**Killed on Duty by Enemy Action 19<sup>th</sup> June 1944.**



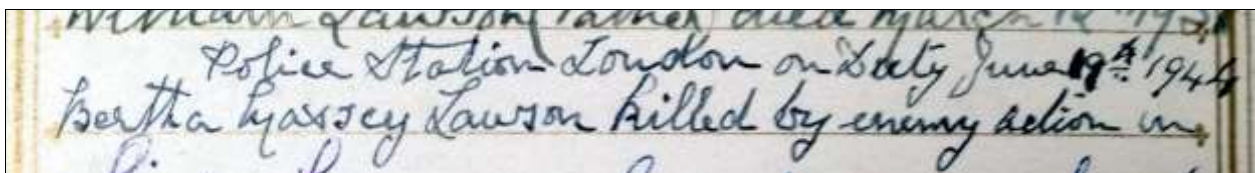
Bertha's portrait and her signature when she was attested (sworn in)

Family History

Born Bertha Massey Lawson at Shrewsbury, Shropshire on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1910, Bertha was the only daughter of Sarah Ann Lawson, a single woman, aged 21, occupation domestic servant. One of seven children, Sarah resided with her parents, William and Emma, her younger brother Wilfrid, and daughter Bertha at Glebe Cottage, Stockton, Newport, Shropshire. The name of Bertha's natural father is not recorded on her birth certificate and he is unknown; Bertha's middle name of Massey is a surname and probably relates to a significant relative but who is unknown.



Bertha's birth and death are shown in the Lawson family Bible





Bertha was posted to 'A' (Whitehall) Division as Probationer No. 128-423. On 7<sup>th</sup> October 1940 Bertha was transferred to 'B' (Chelsea) Division, and on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1941 to 'C' (St. James's) Division, which included Tottenham Court Road Police Station ('CT') Section. Her duties would mainly have included dealing with women and children.

In July 1940 the old police station at 58 Tottenham Court Road and 19 Whitfield Street had been closed for re-building and all business transferred to 16-17 Rathbone Street, W1, a former Section House (single officer accommodation) it was re-designated Tottenham Court Road Police Station and Bertha would initially have worked out of these premises. Whilst there, Police Orders of 28<sup>th</sup> August 1942, recorded that she had received a Commissioner's Commendation for her work in dealing with "Offences against Betting, Gaming & Licensing Acts"; such a Commendation would be a rare event for a uniformed WPC. On 10<sup>th</sup> December 1942, the temporary police station at Rathbone Street closed and all business was moved to the new station at 56, Tottenham Court Road.

One of her beats adjoined West End Central ('CD') Section at Oxford Circus and on the morning of 19<sup>th</sup> June 1944 a WPC on early turn patrol from 'CD' saw Bertha patrolling her beat in that area. Bertha's colleague returned to West End Central for refreshments, while presumably Bertha did likewise.

### Bertha's Death

On 13<sup>th</sup> June 1944, just a week after, and prompted by the Allied 'D Day' invasion of Europe, the German Luftwaffe launched the first of nearly 10,000 of its new secret weapon, a pilotless guided missile, carrying 850 kg (1,870 lbs) of High Explosive in its nose, which became known as the V-1 flying bomb ('buzz bomb' or 'doodlebug') but in official reports were initially designated simply as 'PACs' (Pilotless Aircraft). At first news of such attacks were heavily censored to prevent the enemy knowing where they landed and thus how accurate they were, resulting in there being no press reports of this or similar incidents at the time.

After months with virtually no air raids, following this first attack, the following weekend saw the Metropolitan Police District receiving multiple devastating attacks - overnight from Thursday to Friday afternoon 70 PACs were reported causing extensive damage and 1,237 casualties including 136 killed; on Saturday 37 fell with 53 killed and 383 injured; during Saturday night and throughout Sunday 82 fell causing 332 deaths and at least 1,189 injured.

It is not known if Bertha (who had already been through The Blitz) had been working over this weekend, but those finishing nights and coming on early turn duty on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> June must have been relieved when the air raid sirens gave the all clear at 6.09am after nearly 8 hours. It was not to last long as the warnings sounded again just 15 minutes later with the first of several more throughout the day, finishing at 10.51am, but too late for Bertha.

Bertha's colleague taking refreshments at West End Central heard a big bang and knew it was near. Woman Police Inspector Butcher, who was visiting the women police in the West End, heard the V-1 and saw, as the motor cut out, it check and fall. Bertha was just leaving Tottenham Court Road to go back on her beat when it landed at the rear of the station damaging the building, destroying two police motor vehicles in the garage and bringing down a wall which buried WPC Gleghorn. Inspector Violet Butcher was on the scene within minutes but could do little but hold Bertha's hand until she was freed from the rubble and taken to the Middlesex Hospital nearby, where she died later that day. Four other officers were injured.

As well as Bertha, on the same day Inspectors Sylvester and Giles were killed on duty in a V-1 attack at Wimbledon. On Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> June the 'PACs' were re-designated 'Flying Bombs'




Brick buildings: Tottenham Court Road (C) Section damaged 2 P.M.s in vehicles  
 destroyed in garage. Slight damage to house behind garage. Gas in  
 street.  
 Non-bombing: 3 killed 4 injured  
 Total Casualties: 85 ~~to~~ killed, 323 injured (approx)  
 (includes  
 6 hrs. 4/6)

Extract from Metropolitan Police War Diary (Air Raids) for Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> June 1944

In line with other Air Raid fatalities, no inquest was held but Bertha's cause of death was registered on 21 June as "Due to War Operations".

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH



GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER  
Application Number 1148152/1

|   |   |  |        |             |  |                          |  |                                 |   |
|---|---|--|--------|-------------|--|--------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|
| REGISTRATION DISTRICT                       |   | St Marylebone                                |        |             |  |                          |  |                                 |   |
| 1944 DEATH in the Sub-district of All Souls |   | in the Metropolitan Borough of St Marylebone |        |             |  |                          |  |                                 |   |
| Columns:-                                   | 1   | 2  | 3      | 4           | 5  | 6                        | 7  | 8                               | 9                                       |
| No.   | When and where died                           | Name and surname                             | Sex    | Age         | Occupation   | Cause of death           | Signature, description and residence of informant                              | When registered                 | Signature of registrar                  |
| 218   | Middlesex<br>June 1944<br>Mussell<br>Hospital | Bertha<br>Massey<br>Gleghorn                 | Female | 33<br>years | 454 Holland Road<br>Barnet Herts.<br>Appt. Police Officer<br>Daughter of<br>Supt. Gleghorn<br>Police Constable | Due to<br>War Operations | George Gleghorn<br>Inspector<br>10, Salvation Road<br>Barkington<br>to Wembley | Twenty<br>first<br>June<br>1944 | Frank<br>Bellall<br>Deputy<br>Registrar |

### Roll of Honour & Memorials

Police Orders recorded Bertha's death the following day Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> June, along with other fallen officers, under "Roll of Honour" namely: "C. Woman P.C. 128-423 Gleghorn. Died on 19<sup>th</sup> June as the result of injuries received from a bomb explosion during an enemy air attack."

**Metropolitan Police Orders.** TUESDAY, 20TH JUNE, 1944.

1 Roll of Honour.—

A. P.C. 468-123861 James, Flying Officer (Air-Bomber), Royal Air Force. Missing and presumed killed in action on 2nd January.

H. P.C. 568-128032 Smith, Sergeant (Pilot), Royal Air Force. Killed on active service on 16th May.

C. Woman P.C. 128-423 Gleghorn. Died on 19th June as the result of injuries received from a bomb explosion during an enemy air attack.

M. W.R. 878-25471 Durrant. Killed by a bomb explosion during an enemy air attack on 16th June.

V. Inspector 114157 Sylvester. Killed by a bomb explosion during an enemy air attack on 19th June.

V. Inspector 0100478 Giles (RP). Killed by a bomb explosion during an enemy air attack on 19th June.

Other than a short report of this fact in Police review of 30<sup>th</sup> June, there were no press releases of any kind relating to either her death or funeral.

A framed commemorative photographic portrait of Bertha in uniform bearing the Force Badge and words “W.P.C. BERTHA GLEGHORN. 128 ‘C’ / KILLED BY ENEMY ACTION ON DUTY AT / TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD, W.1. 19<sup>th</sup> JUNE 1944.” was hung in the Women Police room at the station by her colleagues. And after the war a commemorative wooden plaque was erected in honoured memory of 6 named officers, including Bertha, from the station who had given their lives in the war.



Her name and details were recorded in the War Roll of Honour then sited at New Scotland Yard.



Also in the Metropolitan Police War Roll of Honour dedicated in 1950 at Westminster Abbey.



|                         |   |             |
|-------------------------|---|-------------|
| Gillies, Neil           | T | Ealing      |
| Ginn, Raymond Henry     | C | St. James's |
| Gleghorn, Bertha Massey | C | St. James's |
| Glen, Simeon            | F | Hammermith  |
| Globe, Sydney           | L | Lambeth     |

And was also recorded in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Civilian War Dead Roll.

GLEGHORN, BERTHA MASSEY, age 33; Woman Police Officer; of 54 Holland Park Avenue, Kensington. Daughter of George and Sarah Ann Gleghorn. Injured 19 June 1944, at Tottenham Court Road Police Station; died same day at Middlesex Hospital.

CWGC Civilian War Dead Roll extract

None of these mentioned something which now seems significant, in that she was the first female Metropolitan police officer to die on duty and possibly the first throughout the UK.

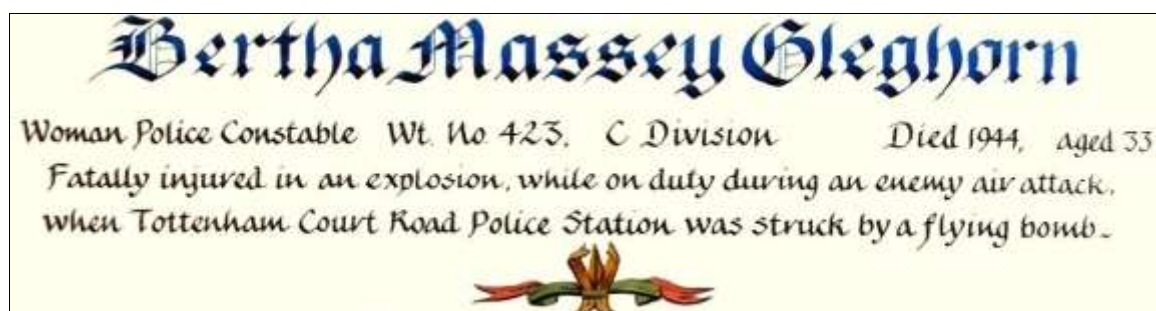
A generation later all were gone from memory or general sight.

### Research

In 1980 Metropolitan Police Constable Anthony Rae began research into the deaths on duty of British police officers, something never previously undertaken on a historical basis nationally. In 1995, with ACPO and police service support, the National Police Officers Roll of Honour research project was established. At this time the only Metropolitan Police record of deaths on duty consisted of a Roll of Honour Book displayed New Scotland Yard containing the names of some 60 officers who had died performing dangerous duties or acts of gallantry since 1924.

Anthony was asked to research a less exclusive Roll of Honour to record all line of duty deaths going back to 1829, initially for inclusion in a new Official Encyclopedia of Scotland Yard published in 1999, and then for a new ceremonial Book of Remembrance completed in 2001.

Access was given to all historical records and archives uncovering for the first time the names of some 700 Metropolitan officers who had died in the line of duty, including over 200 who had died on or off duty during wartime air raids. Among the various war time casualty lists and Rolls of Honour found in the archives, Bertha's name stood out as the only female officer killed on duty. In 2001, another generation on, she was once again honoured when her name and details were displayed, with all who had died, in the Book of Remembrance dedicated by Her Majesty The Queen near the new Metropolitan Police Service Memorial at the Peel Centre, Hendon.

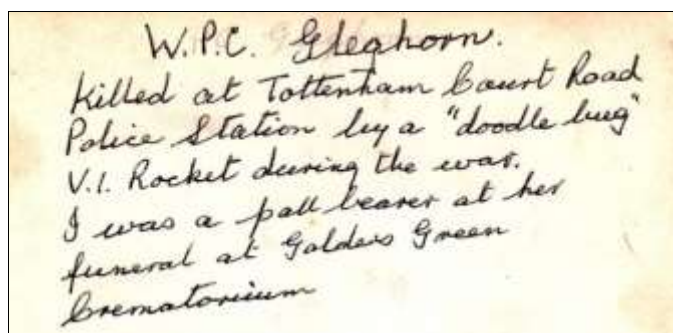


Of the physical memorials there was no trace of the War Memorial Board but it is hoped this still survives, forgotten but intact, in one of London's police stations or store rooms. Of the framed commemorative portrait there was at first no trace, then following the Book dedication, London resident and amateur local historian, Keith Foster, volunteered his services to both the Roll of Honour Research Project and the Metropolitan Police Archives. During his researches over the years he became fascinated with Bertha's story, her lack of recognition and any visible memorials. He eventually tracked down the portrait to the Historic Archives store where it still remains inaccessible; enquiries at stations about the War Board were inconclusive.



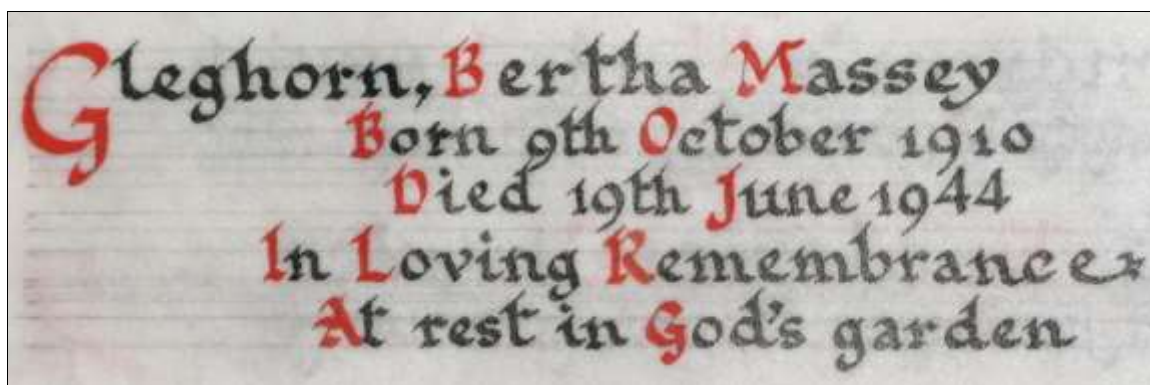
Keith then concentrated on another memorial possibility, Bertha's grave; perhaps there stood a memorial stone from the police in recognition of her service and sacrifice. Checks with cemeteries throughout London and the Darlington area of Durham home of the Gleghorn family proved negative. Amazingly through careful research in 2007 Keith then discovered that Gleghorn was not her registered birth name, but Lawson, opening up another area of family research in the Shrewsbury area of Shropshire. But alas despite newspaper and family history appeals there remained no trace of Bertha's final resting place.

But it was not to finish there as 5 years later Keith reviewed the case and wrote an article which was published on the Project website [www.policerollofhonour.org.uk](http://www.policerollofhonour.org.uk) appealing for further information especially from relatives. Whilst no relatives came forward, in 2014 the daughter of one of Bertha's police friends and colleagues, had found amongst her late father's possessions a photo of Bertha in uniform and on the back he had written: "W.P.C. Gleghorn. Killed at Tottenham Court Road Police Station by a "doodle bug" V.I. Rocket during the war. I was a pall bearer at her funeral at Golders Green Crematorium"



So in the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of her death on duty, Bertha's full story can at last be told; enquiries at the Crematorium have found she was in fact cremated there on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1944 and her ashes dispersed in the Crematorium gardens. No memorial was erected but an entry was made in the crematorium's Book of Remembrance, her epitaph reads:

"Gleghorn, Bertha Massey / Born 9<sup>th</sup> October 1910 / Died 19<sup>th</sup> June 1944 / In Loving Remembrance / At rest in God's garden".



### New Memorial

Contact was made with the current police Westminster Borough covering the former 'C' Division and whilst too late to arrange anything for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death, plans are now underway by the Metropolitan Police to erect a new memorial plaque at Charing Cross Police Station, the Borough Headquarters, (Tottenham Court Road no longer being a Metropolitan Police station) as a lasting tribute to Bertha Massey Gleghorn – she is not forgotten.