

CITY OF LONDON POLICE

President and Historians -

There can be no doubt that the practice of Law and Order, which may perhaps be defined as the "restriction of individual freedom for the good of the majority", goes back a very long way. Take the following quotations:

"So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east end of the Garden of Eden cherubims, with a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life". Genesis IV.24.

Useful things, those flaming swords!

This is then, or so I believe, the earliest historical allusion to the use of force to prevent re-entry onto premises by erst-while occupants who might then have claimed "squatters' rights". Truly some things never change!

Of course it would be unfair to deduce from this episode that all police thereafter have been angels. Indeed there is a significant and sometimes vociferous body of opinion to the contrary - especially amongst the criminal classes: but it does show that authority to impose a given mode of conduct goes back to the earliest days - certainly to the time "when the memory of man runneth not to the contrary".

As far as the City is concerned, there is evidence that some sort of police existed in London at the time of the Norman Conquest. Over the years it grew to meet changing needs and is reasonably well documented from the thirteenth century, though, interestingly, in those early days the emphasis was all upon attack from outside rather than the maintenance of internal order. That part of their duties was left to "seasonal watches" which patrolled the streets at certain times of the year, notably over the Christmas period from 24th December to the following 6th January. This was scarcely surprising for the City at that time was a fortified town on the north bank of the Thames with a Roman wall protecting its other sides and battlements guarding it from the river. At evening curfew some 200 constables - one from each precinct - would arm themselves and, whilst half stood guard over the closed City gates, the other half patrolled the water's edge, giving rise to the term "standing and marching watch".

Time passed and with it went the need for this defensive stance, so that in the sixteenth century the constables were re-organised on a ward basis and, together with the beadles, were appointed joint heads of the watch in each of the 25 (later 26) wards, and the "watch and ward" system - essentially day and night watchmen - came into being. These men were not paid professionals but selected from those householders "paying scot" and "bearing lot" - the former referring to the payment of rates and the latter to the duty borne by each to sweep the ground before his house, provide water buckets in case of fire and serve his turn as constable, beadle or scavenger.

Since citizens also had to earn a living, these duties, which increased in frequency as the City grew, became over burdensome. In theory, each constable was elected: in practice, he was nominated for one year by the ward authority. If he lived and worked in two wards, he was doubly liable. If residing outside the City - even as far away as Coventry - but still paying "scot" within it, not only could he be elected but he was supposed to be "on call" twenty-four hours a day. Failure in this duty could result in imprisonment, a fine or both. Faced with ruin, many householders resorted to hiring substitutes from the cheapest available labour and inevitably these mercenaries soon became known as lazy, inefficient and corrupt.

Successive Lord Mayors attempted reforms, but could do little without the co-operation of the citizens. The Corporation, in common with the rest of the country, had no alternative but to tolerate this state of affairs until, in the mid-eighteenth century, a proposal was made for a paid force. The response was immediate. There was national uproar, since this was perceived as the first step in forming a police state! Not such a bizarre reaction as it may seem today, for the excesses of the French secret police at that time struck a chill of horror on this side of the Channel.

In 1784, following the Gordon Riots, the first City Day Force was formed. It was small and even by 1824 still had under 100 men. Its only legacy to police history is the uniform of top hat, blue frock coat and blue trousers adopted by the Metropolitan Police Force five years later.

In 1822, the then Home Secretary, Sir Robert Peel, promoted a Bill for a paid force, but had it rejected by hostile public opinion, largely still owing to the lasting image of atrocities of the French secret police during the Revolution. But he was no fool and in bringing forward his next draft, he placed the City of London under the control of the proposed Commissioner, well knowing that the Whigs, then in opposition, being close allies of the City, would regard this as an attack upon its privileges. Then in the wake

of the following outcry, he agreed to drop that part of the measure on condition that the remainder was unopposed. Thus, in 1829, his famous "Act for improving the Police in and near the Metropolis" was passed into law, with a uniform and organisation based upon that of the City of London Day Police.

In the Square Mile improvements were made also and by 1838 a force of 500 men under a Superintendent was in place.

There followed "The City of London Police Act 1839", authorising the appointment of a Commissioner subject to Royal Assent (the only Force where this applies), and from that moment we were officially in business as a fully independent entity.

It would take too long in a brief paper to rehearse in detail the measures and movements resulting from that historic occasion 154 years ago, as the complexity, jurisdiction and scope of this service has evolved at an ever increasing technological rate. Gone are those nostalgic days when it used to be said of our neighbouring force that constables always patrolled in threes - one could read, one could write and the third just liked going around with intellectuals!

In all, there have been only nine Commissioners:

Mr. Daniel Whittle Harvey	1839-1863
Col. Sir James Fraser	1863-1890
Lt. Col. Sir Henry Smith, KCB	1890-1902
Sir William Nott-Bower, KCVO	1902-1925
Lt. Col. Sir Hugh Turnbull, KCVO, KBE	1925-1950
Sir Arthur Young, KBE, CMG, CVO, KPM	1950-1971
Sir James Page, CBE, QPM	1971-1977
Mr. Peter Marshall, QPM	1978-1985
Mr. Owen Kelly, QPM	1985-1993

An average of 17 years in office is a very good record.

The first Commissioner was Daniel Whittle Harvey, MP, an office he had to relinquish since the final Bill approved by Parliament prohibited membership of the House as Commissioner in exchange for greater authority as head of Police. This Act was the first "modern" policing statute affecting the City. Under it, the Corporation as Police Authority was allowed to delegate its powers to a Committee, which it did with

alacrity. Indeed, that situation has continued ever since, being confirmed as lately as the Police Act 1964 and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which lay down the present tripartite structure, i.e. Police Authority, Commissioner and Home Office. Roughly divided, this means that the Committee deals with all administrative matters relating to the Force, the Commissioner is paramount for everything operational and the Home Office holds an overall watching brief, especially through Her Majesty's Inspectors who carry out annual visitations, make reports and recommend - or otherwise - the issue of a certificate of competence.

I would here emphasise from my own experience as Chairman of the Police Committee, that "inspections" are no "rubber stamp". It has amazed me, when "sitting-in" with the Inspector, how articulate and frank are the comments - not to say occasional criticisms - coming from constables upwards throughout all ranks in front of their Commissioner in response to these "question and answer" sessions.

A great deal of work for the visit is done by the Staff Officer who prepares the agenda beforehand : this results in precise, concise and productive interviews which, in my limited experience, do achieve results in helping the Inspector to pinpoint suggestions in his report and award praise or criticism as his two or three days with the Force may warrant.

Adverting to our first Commissioner, originally his office was in Guildhall itself but he removed in 1841 to 26 Old Jewry, where a "prestigious" building was bought to combine both office and residence. It was rebuilt in 1930, but retained its fine carved oak staircase and has remained our headquarters ever since, though now it mainly provides over-night accommodation whenever needed, because subsequent Commissioners have usually lived outside the City.

Any detailed descriptions of the Force's development over the past one-and-a-half centuries would take far too long but the following are just a few examples:

1860 First telecommunications system introduced throughout the City.

This and subsequent references are easy to make, but it is hard at this distance in time to realise the enormous impact they had upon the service at the moment of adoption. This applies generally to the examples I quote, but is also an on-going phenomenon in police work across the board : it is impossible

to limit scientific discovery and knowledge to the "great and the good"; so every advance contributing to the detection and frustration of crime can be of far greater importance than is the case in the more ordinary walks of life.

- 1865 City Police Hospital founded at Bishopsgate. Continued to operate until 1947 when superseded by the National Health Service.
- 1907 Ambulance Service initiated and run until 1949 when taken over by the London Ambulance Service.
- 1937 First two patrol cars purchased and linked by radio with Information Room at New Scotland Yard.
- 1939-45 War time - especially the Blitz - imposed enormous stress and strain upon the Force, which became the co-ordinator of other Services. A Warden's Service, under a police officer, was formed and eventually that led to the start of our Special Constables.
- 1949 First woman Sergeant and six WPC's appointed. Truly a revolution in a previously all-male service!
- 1966 First communications centre established in the newly purpose-built Wood Street Police Station, thereby greatly improving links with the Home Office Research and Development Branch.
- 1970 Police National Computer link-ups. Thereafter all forces in England, Scotland and Wales had twenty-four hour access within seconds of listed information on vehicles, fingerprints, criminal names and missing persons.
- 1984 Divisions reduced to two: Snow Hill in West, Bishopsgate in East, Wood Street becoming a police office housing the Fraud Squad, Operations Support, Mounted Branch, etc.
- 1993 Government White Paper on the Sheehy Report, causing much turmoil, uncertainty, frustration and anxiety, yet to be resolved!

Police work in any decade must always aim to keep ahead of the constantly increasing sophistication of crime. A hundred years ago motor vehicles,

airplanes, wireless, television, computer technology, finger printing, company fraud, IRA terrorist bombs, drugs and many other things now occupying police time on a daily basis, were either non-existent or in stages of infancy. Today's policeman has to be highly trained and competent in all manner of skills quite unknown to his predecessor. None the less, as our Commissioner frequently stresses in his annual reports, the City is still a relatively safe place in which to live and work. For me, that view is underscored by a paragraph that caught my eye in the January 1991 issue of the magazine "Police". I quote:

"Last year in the Capitol area of Washington DC, which is about the size of the City of London, police were called out to 300 murders amongst a population of about three quarters of a million".

Finally, as probably all historians know already, our Commissioner, Owen Kelly, retires on 7 December. I have worked with him particularly closely when I was Chairman of our Police Committee. He has given unstintingly of himself and contributed much to the good of the Force and I am sure we all greatly appreciate his service to the City and wish him and Mrs. Kelly well in the future.

H.W.S.H.
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