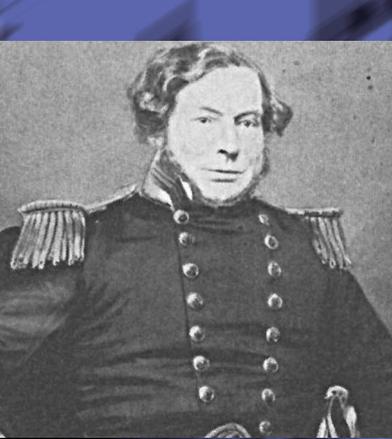




**Wiltshire Constabulary**

# THE OLDEST AND THE BEST



## The History of Wiltshire Constabulary **1839-2003**

Paul Sample

Second Edition

**WILTSHIRE CONSTABULARY**  
**CHIEF CONSTABLES 1839 - 2003**

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<i>1839 - 1870</i>	Captain Samuel Meredith RN
<i>1870 - 1908</i>	Captain Robert Sterne RN
<i>1908 - 1943</i>	Colonel Sir Höel Llewellyn DSO, DL
<i>1943 - 1946</i>	Mr W.T. Brooks (Acting Chief Constable)
<i>1946 - 1963</i>	Lt. Colonel Harold Golden CBE
<i>1963 - 1979</i>	Mr George Robert Glendinning OBE, QPM
<i>1979 - 1983</i>	Mr Kenneth Mayer QPM
<i>1983 - 1988</i>	Mr Donald Smith OBE, QPM
<i>1988 - 1997</i>	Mr Walter Girven QPM, LL B, FBIM
<i>1997 - date</i>	Dame Elizabeth Neville DBE, QPM, MA, PhD

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## FOREWORD

**Primus et Optimus** or **First and Best** is the motto of the Wiltshire Constabulary. As this book explains, it is the oldest County Police Force in the United Kingdom. For that reason, I was delighted to be invited to bring the Force history up to date.

Over the years several officers have commented kindly about the first edition. Many are proud of their shared 'policing history'. The public is also rightly proud of Wiltshire Constabulary.

In writing this edition, I'd like to thank the many individuals who helped with the supply of materials. Regretably it has been possible to include only a fraction of the information received.

In particular, I would like to thank former Police Sergeant Peter Smith and former Inspectors Glyn Jones and Harry Hull for their help in compiling the first edition. Inspector Steve Bridge, who is another in the long line of Wiltshire Constabulary history enthusiasts, has allowed me to use much of the material that he has been able to compile in the intervening years.

For this edition, I am also grateful to Detective Chief Superintendent Gary Chatfield, Steve Botham and Sergeant Ian Partington.

Elizabeth Marginson has supplied boundless enthusiasm and opened many doors – including those of Cathryn Martyn and Pete Charman, Photographic Department, and Chris Franklin, now of Kennet District Council, who digitized hundreds of photographs for future use. Roy Denning, Director of Finance and Facilities, has provided much detail on the past ten years and John D'Arcy, of Wiltshire County Archives, has allowed many of Wiltshire's precious photographs to be borrowed and copied. Finally, Judy Hungerford, of Hungerford Design, has re-designed the book in a way which adds clarity and dignity to the subject matter, and Natalie Hobman, Force Designer has been instrumental in the final publication.

In revising the history, constraints of space and time have again come into play. Much has been written and much has been left out. My apologies to all of those who feel I have taken insufficient account of their special interest. In any work of this size, errors will be inevitable – but we have tried to keep them to a minimum, and we would welcome any comments.

Without the full co-operation of Wiltshire Constabulary my task would have been impossible. Officers and former officers from all around the County have sent in numerous articles and documents.

Throughout the past ten years, I have been asked to speak to all sorts of meetings about the history of the Force. Every year I have received letters and phone calls from family historians and others who are fascinated by the colourful history of our Constabulary. I therefore regard this book as a 'work in progress' and would be delighted to receive information, papers and other archives relating to the Wiltshire Force for future editions of the book.

My fervent hope is that members of the Force will, themselves, secure the future history of Wiltshire Police by bringing their combined talents and expertise to bear in an Historical Society. I know that the Force, at its very highest level, would dearly like to see this achieved.

As a genuine Wiltshire Moonraker, born and bred in the County, I firmly believe that Wiltshire is lucky to have retained its own distinct Constabulary. In a World of rationalisation, merger and amalgamation, long may it remain *The Oldest and The Best!*

*Paul Sample  
Salisbury 2003*

## INTRODUCTION



In this, the Constabulary's 165th year of service to Wiltshire, I'm delighted to have been asked to write the Introduction to the second edition of *The Oldest and Best*. As the first of the County Forces to be created by virtue of the 1839 County Police Act, we have a long and varied history, which I hope you will find both interesting and thought provoking.

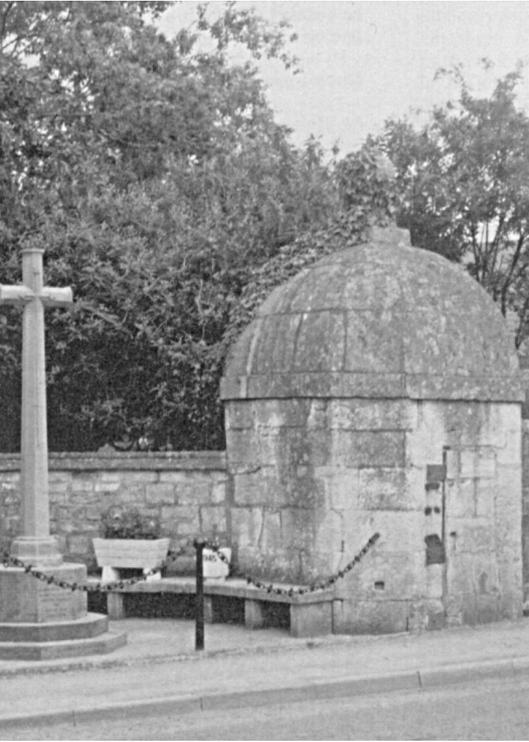
Undoubtedly those who met at Marlborough in November of 1839, and recommended the formation of a 200 strong Constabulary for Wiltshire, should be considered forward thinking individuals. However, it is inconceivable that they could have envisaged how the Force would change in the subsequent years. It has developed into an organisation now employing just over 2000 people, comprising both police and police staff; was one of the first to use a helicopter in a joint police/air-ambulance role, and has recently opened the first purpose-built joint emergency services operations room in the Country. Paul Sample's history gives an excellent insight into this fascinating journey and into the lives and working conditions of those people who made it possible.

Along with the changes, this history also highlights the many constants of locally delivered policing. Whilst the idea of requesting airborne assistance would have been beyond the wildest dreams of those first officers, I'm sure they would, if back on patrol today, recognise our continuing commitment to issues such as community safety, public reassurance and crime prevention and detection.

I am very proud of our Force and its history. I hope that in reading this book you will come to share some of that pride.

*From Chief Constable Dame Elizabeth Neville, DBE, QPM, MA, PhD*

## RIOTS AND REBELLION



**Hilperton Blind House was one of several similar buildings used to hold drunks, vagrants and prisoners in the days before Wiltshire Constabulary was formed.**

*Picture supplied by Peter Smith, Devizes.*

The policing of rural Wiltshire until 1839 was the responsibility of the Parish or Petty Constables, whose ancestors dated from before the establishment of Parliament. Appointed by the Courts Leet and latterly by the Magistrates in Quarter Sessions, the constables were supervised by the Magistrates. They were unpaid, untrained and usually unwilling to undertake any protracted investigation.

In 1836, the City of Salisbury took a decision to form its own modern police force but the rest of the County took a few years to catch up. At the Quarter Sessions, committees of Magistrates were set up to deal with the administration of the County. They met in different parts of the County at the same time as the Court, four times a year. The constables seldom acted on their own initiative, but usually on the complaint of another, who was invariably the prosecutor when an offence was detected. Many large areas, and some major communities, saw no police from one year to the next. In times of unrest, additional or special constables would be sworn in, but were quickly released as troubles abated. This ad-hoc approach to policing had a low chance of detection and apprehension of offenders.

The first half of the 19th century was a time of change and unrest throughout Britain. War with Napoleon, economic upturns and slumps, the demands for electoral reform, the Peterloo massacre, the Swing Riots, Anti-Corn Law protests and Chartism defined a period of immense political turbulence and social change.

As the Industrial Revolution progressed, bringing more and more social and public order problems, several Wiltshire communities formed 'private associations for the prosecution of felons'. Such organisations were formed at Box, Devizes, Lacock, Ramsbury, Aldbourne and Trowbridge. The Devizes Prosecution Society, for instance, was formed in 1787 and continued to hold social meetings until 1867. The agricultural riots and the later Chartist disturbances all were to put an insupportable strain upon the Parish Constables.

In London pressure for reform was strong. When Sir Robert Peel, the Home Secretary, introduced his 1829 Metropolitan Police Bill, it met with little Parliamentary opposition. The Act gave rise to the appearance on London's streets of 'Peelers' and 'Bobbies'.

Five years later the Municipal Corporations Act 1835 required the boroughs to set up their own police forces. It was as a result of this Act that Salisbury set up its own City police force. In 1835, Devizes had four policemen, a night constable and four constables who acted as watchmen. These continued until they were amalgamated into the Wiltshire Constabulary in 1847.

In Wiltshire calls for a force similar to the Metropolitan Police increased as the public became alarmed by the increasing levels of violence.

Throughout November 1830 agricultural workers staged major disturbances in the South West in protest against poor wages and food price rises. Most attributed their poverty to the introduction of new agricultural machinery – and accordingly embarked on an orgy of destruction.

On 23rd November 1830 such a riot occurred at Bishopdown Farm, near Salisbury. A party of men had wrecked a threshing machine, and, armed with whatever weapons they could lay their hands on, began to march towards Salisbury – intent on destroying Messrs Figes Iron Foundry.

Within an hour Salisbury was in turmoil as the news spread. Wealthier citizens armed themselves; special constables were sworn in and the Yeomanry Cavalry were mobilised.

The rioters were met on the road, but refused to withdraw. Above angry threats and taunts the Riot Act was read. Eventually the militia arrived and moved in to break up the crowd. A number of men were taken prisoner – and gradually the gathering was dispersed.

The rioting, however, was in full swing in other parts of the County and serious incidents took place later that day in at least fourteen towns and villages.



**The County's only surviving example of a wooden Blind House is at Bromham. It is said that drunks would suck beer from clay pipes pushed through the keyhole into tankards held outside by their friends.**

*Picture supplied by Peter Smith, Devizes.*

All night long fires burned around Devizes as the mobs marched from farm to farm wrecking machinery and setting fire to stores of winter food and grain. Fire crews had their hoses cut or were stoned by the mob as they fought the fires. The situation became so desperate that some farmers dragged their machinery into the fields and, in order to dissuade the mob from visiting their farms, set light to it themselves.

Local Magistrates called upon the military to restore order. In Alderbury, Lord Radnor called on the Hindon Troop of the Yeomanry Cavalry to disperse the rioters. On the following day, on their way home, the Troop came across a mob of between 300 and 500 who had set about destroying all of the machinery and some of the outbuildings near the Pythouse estate.

With the help of his bailiff and land agent, the owner Mr. Bennett – a local MP – attempted to reason with the mob. Nevertheless, he and his two employees were attacked and beaten. Only the arrival of the Cavalry saved their lives.

Seeing the plight of the three, the cavalry charged through a hail of stones and other missiles. Sabres and pistols were drawn and a bloody fight ensued. Twenty-nine rioters were arrested, one man was killed and many others were very seriously injured. This was the last major such disturbance during the agricultural riots – but it was probably the most serious.

A Special Commission, which had been set up to try the offenders, visited the County and dealt with 225 cases of willful destruction of machinery and property as well as 49 cases of extortion. Two ringleaders were sentenced to death, but they were reprieved and transported to the colonies.

In 1836, following the passing of the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act and Parliamentary pressure for legislation to set up County Constabularies, a Royal Commission was asked to look into crime and public order.

One particular issue was the system of rewards designed to encourage the detection of crime. This was especially open to abuse, and many unscrupulous individuals took advantage of it. There had emerged a class of informer, who earned a living from the fees gained by their activities.

The problem is illustrated in a letter from Wiltshire's Clerk of the Peace to the Home Office, dated 29th July 1836. The letter refers to John Thomas Green, his brother William, and Hannah Richards who: 'have for some years carried on a system of prosecuting and giving Evidence against innocent Persons for pretended Robberies etc. for the Sake of the County Allowances to prosecutors and Witnesses.' In the five years until 1836 such people brought twelve cases before the Assizes, and five to the Quarter Sessions.

It was the rise of Chartism, however, which was to provide the Commission with the most urgent excuse for reform. The Chartists consisted of a number of political factions united in their support for a six point Charter for Parliamentary reform, including votes for all.

The failure of Lovett's Reform Bill in 1838 was a disappointment to social and political reformers, which led to a further period of violence and unrest reminiscent of the Swing Riots of 1830. The centre of Chartism in the West Country was at Bath. The political message quickly spread to Trowbridge, Westbury, Bradford on Avon, Devizes and Salisbury. The Chartists held torchlight processions and large meetings, attended by as many as 3000 people.

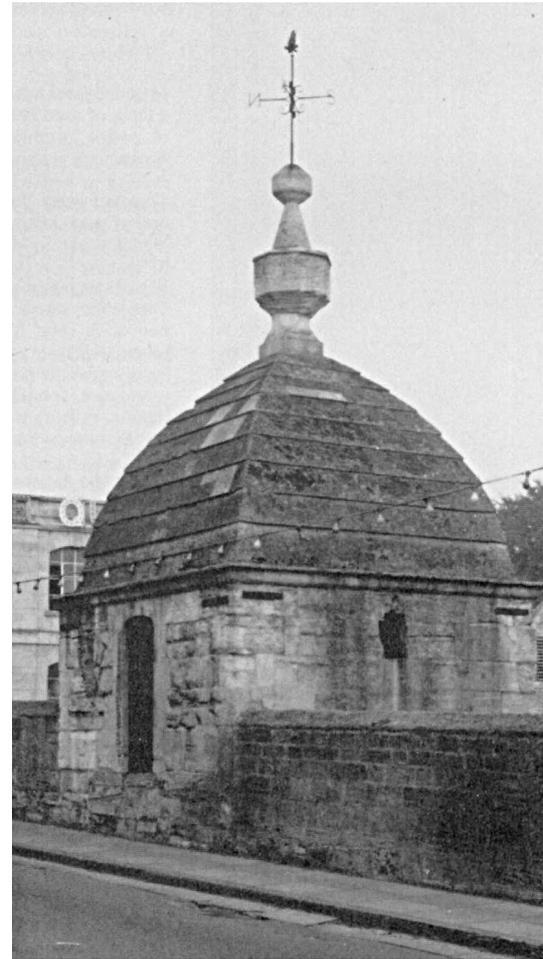
Devizes Market Place witnessed several skirmishes between opposing sides. The Magistrates had difficulty recruiting enough special constables to contain the violence and had to call on troops to restore order.

In the first week of May 1839 leaflets appeared which called on Chartists to gather – with a view to renewing the attack on the town. The Devizes and Melksham Troops of the Yeomanry Cavalry were mobilised and a message was sent to Whitehall requesting help.

Almost immediately twenty men from 'A' Division of the Metropolitan Police were dispatched to Trowbridge, under the command of Inspector Partridge. They arrived on 3rd May.

Apart from the minute Salisbury City Police, it was Wiltshire's first taste of an organised civil police force. The men from the Metropolitan Police faced a tough task. Within a few days one of the officers engaged in clearing a street was struck on the head by a ball apparently fired from an air weapon.

On 5th June six constables were watching, from the window of their lodgings, as a demonstration was dispersed in the street outside.



**Bradford-upon-Avon Blind House.**

*Picture supplied by Peter Smith, Devizes.*



**Steeple Ashton Blind House.**

*Picture supplied by Peter Smith, Devizes.*

Without warning, one of the protesters produced a pistol from under his coat and fired at them. The shot missed, and as the man ran off the police leapt out of the window and gave chase. Eventually the man and his accomplices were caught and arrested.

As a result of the arrest, one of the officers, (who was a principal witness) PC Benbow, became embroiled in a malicious complaint.

He set off that evening with another officer to escort the prisoners to the newly built Devizes Gaol. Having delivered them safely into custody, the officers stopped at the White Swan Inn for refreshment, during which the two officers indulged in mild horseplay around the kitchen door.

Soon afterwards information was laid before the Magistrates by the kitchen maid at the Inn, complaining that Benbow had assaulted her. The Magistrates immediately issued a warrant for Benbow's arrest and Inspector Partridge was summoned to execute it. Accompanied by a special constable, Partridge traveled to Trowbridge, arrested Benbow and escorted him back to Devizes. Rumour had fed upon rumour and as they neared the town an angry mob of Chartists formed with a view to lynch the hapless constable.

There was a fight, but the two men were saved in the nick of time by a party of more respectable citizens determined to see justice carried out. At the hearing, Inspector Partridge exposed the girl's evidence as a tissue of lies. The only people who would corroborate her evidence were Chartists whom she had met after the incident and, importantly, none of the witnesses from the Inn were able to substantiate her story.

The special constable, who had accompanied Inspector Partridge to Trowbridge for the arrest, it transpired, was another Chartist in disguise! Benbow was acquitted and Inspector Partridge was given a good opportunity to inform the Magistrates that it was not done to issue warrants for the arrest of policemen in the Metropolitan Police District. He said he could guarantee the appearance of any of his men if desired.

The Metropolitan Police left Trowbridge in the hands of the military in July 1839. Their ability to control the disturbances without resorting to the use of troops and the valuable insight they had given into the workings of a police force appears to have greatly impressed the Magistrates. Public concern about law and order was not confined to Wiltshire. As the Commission reported, in Britain's towns and cities – thanks to the social effects of the Industrial Revolution – crime was flourishing.

Criminals knew that whatever their offence, because of the lack of an efficient police force, they were extremely unlikely to be brought to book for their crimes.

Parliament had to act. A more efficient form of crime prevention and detection was essential. Punishments more fitting to the crime were required. Above all, Wiltshire – and dozens of other English Counties – needed a regular Force, like the Metropolitan Police.

So it was that, later in 1839, the County Police Act was passed authorising the establishment of police forces in the counties. With the additional pressure of social disturbances, the Wiltshire Magistrates seized on the opportunity as soon as they could.

The Act itself was not mandatory, but permissive – meaning that those attending the Quarter Sessions could please themselves whether to set up a Force. It was not until 1856 that a further County Police Act was passed and it became obligatory for all counties to have their own Constabulary.

## THE MAGISTRATES TAKE ACTION

By the spring of 1839 the Royal Commission had reported and the views from a number of Quarter Sessions had been examined. On 11th April 1839, Wiltshire Magistrates in Quarter Sessions at Salisbury considered several letters on the subject, one of which was from the Home Department.

The letter related that the general consensus of Quarter Sessions from around the Country was: 'that a body of constables appointed by the Magistrates, paid out of the County rate, and disposable at any point of the Shire, where their service might be required, would be desirable, as providing in the most efficient manner for the prevention as well as detection of offences; for the security of person and property; and the constant preservation of the public peace.' The Government wanted to know the views of the Wiltshire Court of Quarter Sessions.

The desirability of such a Force seemed hardly in doubt, and it was the problem of financing and appointing the constables that aroused most interest. Eventually a resolution in support of establishing a Constabulary was passed.

The resolution was sent back to the Home Department and, within a few months the County Police Act, 1839 had finished its passage through the Houses of Parliament.

On 11th September, Wiltshire Magistrates instructed their Clerk, John Swayne, of Wilton, to give formal notice that the question of adopting the new Act would be discussed at the next Court of Quarter Sessions in Marlborough on 15th October 1839.

Public debate intensified as the Quarter Sessions approached. The maximum establishment of one constable to every thousand persons would double the County Rate, said opponents. But Magistrates from the cloth producing towns, who had suffered from Chartist disorders, declared that they would form their own police forces and 'go it alone' if a Force was not set up.

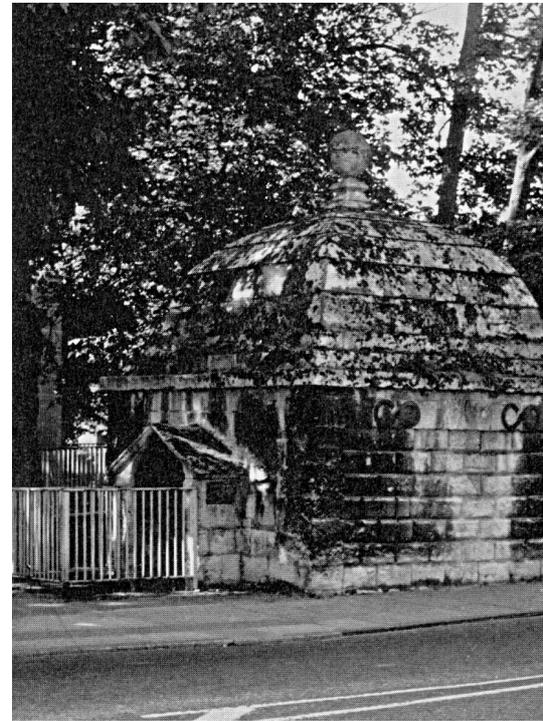
At Marlborough, a considerable debate was held as to the desirability of adopting the Act. But Lord Radnor believed that the Quarter Sessions were not competent to discuss the financial details and staffing requirements that day. At the end of the debate, the Court agreed to appoint a Sub Committee of twelve to discuss the key issues. These were: the efficiency of the present system; the staffing requirement and rates of pay needed for any new Force; and the necessary qualifications for employment.

The Court also decided to adjourn the decision on the desirability of adopting the Act until the Sub-Committee had reported back the following month – on Wednesday 13th November. At 10 am on that day, forty-four Magistrates, Peers and five local MPs converged on Devizes to hear Lord Radnor read the Sub-Committee's report.

The Sub-Committee had come to the conclusion that there should not be less than 200 constables, or one for every 1200 inhabitants, and 4400 acres of land. The total expense would be £11,000 a year. The Chief Constable, they decided should be someone with previous naval or military service. Two amendments, one opposing the creation of the Force, and the other recommending that 110 men would be sufficient, were moved.

These were both roundly defeated, and the Sub-Committee's motion was then carried almost unanimously. Following a further discussion, the Court approved a motion to fix the Chief Constable's salary at £400 a year. Four Superintendents would be paid £100 a year exclusive of clothing but with a horse, and nine Superintendents would be paid £75 a year without a horse. Constables, it was agreed, would be paid 17s. 6d. a week (eighty-seven and a half pence). The resolutions were then compiled into a report, signed by the Magistrates, and sent to the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

The appointment of Chief Constable was advertised in the Wiltshire Gazette on the 21st November 1839. Interviews, before a Committee of Magistrates, would be held at The Bear, Devizes on Wednesday 27th November 1839 at 11 am.



**Trowbridge Blind House.**

*Picture supplied by Peter Smith, Devizes.*



**Captain Samuel Meredith RN, the first Chief Constable of Wiltshire.**

The qualifications were:

- 1) His age must not exceed forty-five.
- 2) He must be certified by a Medical Practitioner to be in good health and of sound constitution, and fitted to perform the duties of the office.
- 3) He must not have been a Bankrupt, nor have taken the benefit of the Insolvent Act.
- 4) He must be recommended to the Secretary of State by the Magistrates, in whom the appointment is vested, as a person of general good character and conduct. If he has been previously employed in any branch of the public service, civil or military, he must produce testimonials from the proper authorities in such service as to general conduct whilst so employed.'

Thirteen candidates presented themselves at The Bear that Wednesday morning. They were each interviewed – but two were found to be over the age limit and a further six withdrew after the interview. Four were short listed for consideration by the Quarter Sessions.

The four were all military officers from the Army and Navy. They were: Captain Calder, Captain Edwards, Lieutenant Hill and Commander Meredith. The candidates were discussed at length during the Quarter Sessions in Devizes the following day – Thursday 28th November 1839.

One Magistrate, Mr Neeld, objected to the preparation of a shortlist by the Committee, and argued that all of the Magistrates, the full Quarter Sessions, should discuss the merits of the thirteen individuals.

Lord Radnor's clear favourite for the post was Captain Hay, who had not even been short-listed. The Captain was two days over the age limit – but Lord Radnor had gone to the length of writing to the Marquis of Normanby, one of Her Majesty's principal Secretaries of State, who had declared that his age would not prohibit Captain Hay's appointment.

In a last ditch effort to get his man onto the shortlist Lord Radnor moved that there were 'special reasons in this County for not adhering to the rule touching the age of the candidate.' His motion was defeated by 39 votes to nine – a fairly crushing majority.

After a short debate, those present at the Quarter Sessions voted to appoint Commander Samuel Meredith as Chief Constable – subject to the approval of the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

A letter was dispatched for London that night, and by less than a week, Wiltshire had beaten Gloucestershire to become the first County to appoint a Chief Constable. Gloucestershire appointed theirs on 1st December, closely followed by Worcestershire on 2nd December and Durham on the 10th.

Approval for Meredith's appointment came in a letter from the Marquis of Normanby on 5th December. The letter was short and to the point: 'I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter submitting for approval the appointment of Samuel Meredith, Commander in Her Majesty's Navy, to be Chief Constable of the County of Wiltshire and I signify to you my approval thereof'

On retirement from the Royal Navy, Meredith was promoted to the rank of Captain, the title by which he has since been known.

## STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Meredith faced a formidable task. He was to raise a Force of over 200 men, allocate them to areas of patrol, and arrange for their accommodation, supervision, clothing and discipline.

This had never been attempted in the County before, and many of the ground rules were modelled on the Metropolitan Police.

Following the appointment of the Chief Constable, an advertisement was placed in the Wiltshire Gazette on 19th December 1839. It read:

*WANTED FOR THE CONSTABULARY FORCE  
in the COUNTY OF WILTS.  
CONSTABLES.*

*Their pay to be 17/6d. per week, with clothing.*

*To be under forty years of age.*

*To stand five feet six inches without shoes.*

*To read and write and keep accounts.*

*To be free from any bodily complaint, of strong constitution  
and generally intelligent.*

*The form of certificate of character to be signed by one or more respectable persons, who have had personal knowledge of the candidate during the last five years at least, either singly or collectively, may be had by personal application to Captain Meredith at the Magistrates' Office at Devizes on Tuesdays and Friday, until on 31st December instant, between the hours of ten and three o'clock.'*

Those recruited started their duties from January 1840 onwards. By the end of March the Force had 12 Superintendents and 170 men, of which 40 were stationed in towns and 120 in rural districts.

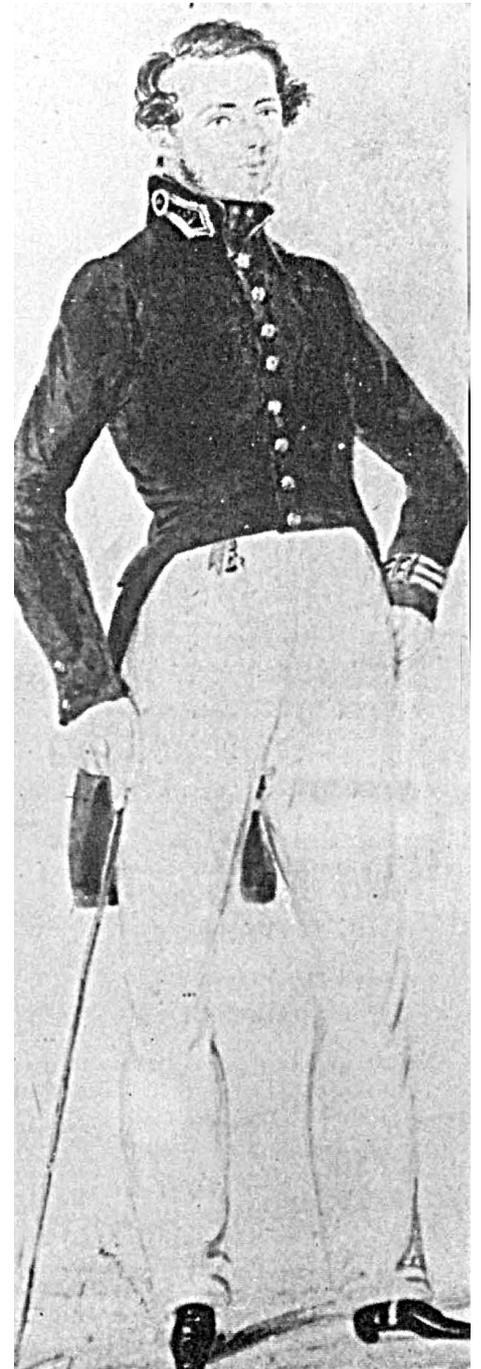
Within the first three months, a number of crimes and incidents had been reported. These included a highway robbery, five burglaries, nine Incendiarisms, nine cattle thefts, 20 vagrants, 24 assaults, 35 drunk and disorderly, 59 felonies and 60 misdemeanours.

A particular problem was the system of Parish Constables, whose responsibilities the new Force now took over. They were a varied mixture, ranging widely in age, enthusiasm and experience. Some applied for positions in the new Constabulary – and one, John Foley, went on to become a significant figure in the famous Rode Hill House murder later in 1860. Those who did not join the Force often remained as Parish Constables for some time, often operating in direct opposition to the paid Force. Nevertheless, Meredith's naval training had prepared him for the task, and in the first year of operation he visited most areas of the County – spending most of his £400 salary on travelling! Meredith organised his Force into Divisions, each under the command of a Superintendent. Constables were allocated to a district within the Division – usually the size of a Parish. They lived and worked within the community, always on call and often patrolling into the early hours.

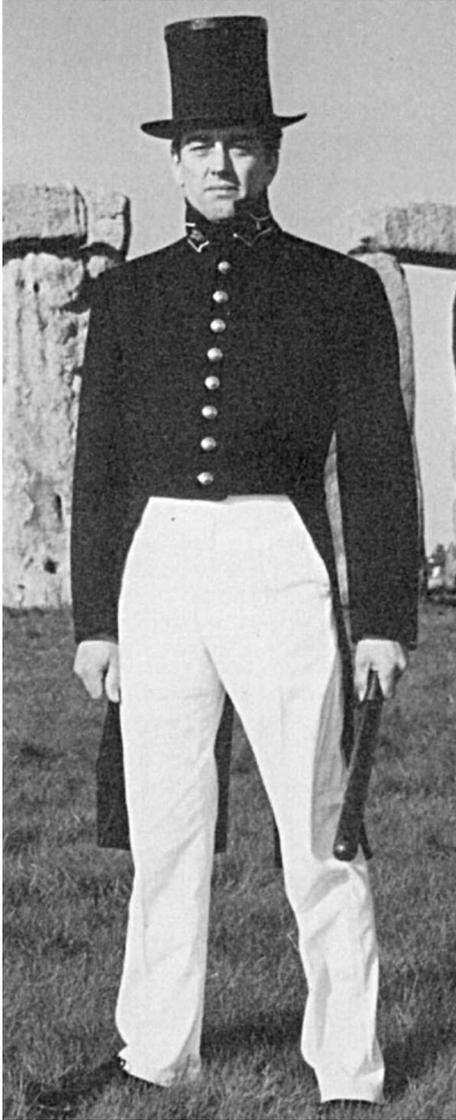
It was a difficult life for the newly appointed police constable. For the most part they were ignorant of their powers or duties. No experienced 'old hands' were around to show them how to deal with difficult situations.

At first no instruction or training was given. The men were interviewed, accepted and sworn in. Then they were sent off, with an instruction book and uniform, to their districts. There they had to find lodgings and commence work.

Superintendents were given the task of travelling around their Division on horseback, instructing the men as they went. The Superintendents were entitled to an allowance of £30 year or the provision and keep of a horse. In July 1843 they were supplied with light carts. This enabled them to take stores and equipment with them when they visited their districts.



**Drawn in September 1841, this is the first known picture of a Wiltshire police constable. He is James Dewey, Police Constable No. 107, who was based at Shrewton.**



**Inspector Noble, dressed as a Wiltshire policeman of the 1840s.**

In August 1843 the Chief Constable issued the first regulations for the care and use of the carts. They were only to be used for transporting prisoners and on police business. 'Steady respectable constables accustomed to horses' were selected as 'reserved men' to look after the horse and cart and to drive it when required. They also assisted in the general running of the Divisional Headquarters.

The instruction book issued to the constables contained the rules issued by the Home Secretary on the powers and duties of a policeman. They were a poor guide to men who were largely uneducated in points of law.

Realising that the men needed basic instruction, Captain Meredith ordered the Superintendents to gather their men together at regular intervals to explain the details of the law.

One of the practices that were drummed into constables from as early as 1844 was the importance of documenting every case with which they were involved. Captain Meredith issued a Force Order in January of that year which detailed precisely what they should do.

'It is my direction that when a constable is bound to give evidence he takes down in writing the dates and facts of the case upon the spot so as to be enabled to refresh his memory before going into court.'

Discipline in Wiltshire Constabulary was rigorous. At Malmesbury, in April 1840, two policemen were convicted and sent to prison for a month after being found guilty of assault! Both men were also discharged from the Force. Nineteen others were dismissed in the first few months. Reasons included drunkenness, disgraceful conduct, inability, drinking at a public house, insulting individuals, associating with prostitutes, and absence without leave.

The early uniform was similar to that of the Metropolitan Police, which in turn was similar to contemporary naval dress. During the first year of a constable's service he was issued with a coat, a greatcoat and badge, a cape, two pairs of trousers, boots, shoes, a hat and a stock (a close fitting neck band). During the second year of service another coat was issued, together with a third pair of trousers, boots, shoes and a hat. Captain Meredith instructed his men to buy two pairs of white military duck trousers to be worn in the summer months.

Stoppages were deducted from the policemen's wages so that their uniforms could be altered and repaired after they left the Force. Such was the quality of the clothing, however, that some uniforms were not returned.

Duties were hard. The men were distributed around the County in the approximate proportion of one to every thousand persons. Most large parishes had their own policeman living in lodgings or a rented house. Later the Force built or bought its own houses. The constable was expected to put in a twelve-hour day – walking from one end of his district to the other, shutting gates, looking out for signs of damage or crime, and keeping conference points with his neighbouring colleagues.

In the absence of telephones, these meetings enabled the police to communicate messages and information quickly and efficiently. Often the meetings took place in the pitch black on the road between two districts. During the summer they were required to work five hours every night between 9pm and 5am – to prevent thefts and arson attacks in the harvest fields in addition to any patrols undertaken during the day.

Each man was armed with a staff or truncheon, which acted as his 'warrant card' or badge of office; they were also given an oil lantern – which was often slung from the belt. When trouble was expected he might be armed with a cutlass. Rules governing the use of the cutlass were strict. It could normally only be issued on the authority of two Justices of the Peace.

Some of the men did not believe that the equipment issued to them was sufficient, and a number began to carry pistols and walking sticks. Meredith drew attention to the dangers of carrying unauthorised weapons on 25th August 1840. One officer was set upon by a gang, had his stick snatched from him, and was savagely assaulted.

In the first few months of the Force each constable was required to submit a weekly report to his local Superintendent. Likewise, Superintendents had to submit reports to the Chief Constable every Monday. The sending of these reports clearly caused some difficulty, and on 27th December 1842, it was decided to use the newly formed penny post service.

Pay was quite generous – although the work was arduous. Each man was paid 17s 6d (eighty seven and a half pence) a week, enough to provide a reasonable standard of living. At first paid on a monthly basis, some constables ran up substantial debts with local shopkeepers. Accordingly monthly payments were stopped and made weekly instead.

In April 1842 Superintendent Batt stole his Division's wages. An officer contacted the Chief Constable to complain that the men had not been paid and that, by coincidence, Superintendent Batt had not been seen for sometime. Meredith called on the Divisional Headquarters and realised what had happened. Investigations revealed that Batt had been seen in Salisbury, but here the trail ended. The Superintendent was never heard of again!

A complex series of measures designed to foil any similar crimes was introduced, involving receipts and set paydays. As a result, Superintendents found that the task of making the books balance was a major headache – and to encourage them to be more accurate they were required to make up any losses and provide personal guarantees of £100!

Many members of society regarded the police with contempt. Police, and their property, were often the subject of vicious attacks. One night, in April 1847, Police Constable William Norris was patrolling Redlynch. In the distance he could see the glow of a major fire. He broke into a run, and as he rounded the final corner he was horrified to see his house ablaze. The rumour was arson. Chief Constable Meredith wrote to his Superintendents: 'The cottage ... was wilfully set on fire and burnt to the ground during his absence on duty when furniture and other articles of his property valued at £12 were destroyed and his means are wholly inadequate to replace this loss. I call upon the Force generally to afford him their assistance by a small contribution.'

The first public order problems for the Wiltshire Constabulary were the substantial disturbances caused by Chartists. On the night of Saturday 8th February 1840, Chief Constable Meredith received a letter from the Magistrates at Trowbridge asking him to send 40 constables to deal with a Chartist meeting to be held there the following Monday morning.

Although they were spread about the districts, across hundreds of square miles, Meredith managed to gather sixty men. When they got to Trowbridge that morning the meeting fizzled out. Only about 150 people turned up – and they were mainly women and young boys.

The organisation required to make this exercise a success was considerable. The 60 men, from a wide area of the County, were successfully gathered in a little under thirty hours. The secret lay in the nightly meetings between neighbouring constables.

At Bradford Upon Avon, another Chartist meeting was to be addressed by the 'notorious' Mr. Potts. On the approach of a constable, however, he ran off and the meeting dispersed.

Although Chartist riots never occurred in Wiltshire again, there still remained a considerable problem of lawlessness among the general population.

Despite the influx of thousands of unruly railway 'navvies', Swindon had only one lock-up. It stood at the top of Newport Street, and was a dark and dingy building only eight feet square. One imprisoned 'navvy' was rescued by his friends. They dug a hole under the door and then burned the building to the ground!

This incident was not unusual. In September 1846 a prisoner escaped from the cells at Warminster, prompting Captain Meredith to record that constables should be put in charge of a lock up until relieved by another officer.

Drunkness wasn't confined to the general public. In April 1840 Meredith wrote that there had been frequent complaints of drunkenness in the Force – particularly on payday. 'These occurrences are disgraceful to the constables and discreditable to the Superintendents.'

Abstinence was encouraged at every opportunity. It was a serious offence to be seen in a public house while on duty. In June 1842 Constable Charles White was convicted of neglect of duty and disobedience of orders by drinking in a beerhouse when he should have been on duty. He was sent to Fisherton Gaol, Salisbury, for one month hard labour.

**Salisbury City's 700th Anniversary Pageant in 1927. These four men are dressed as Salisbury City Police from the 1840s.**

*Picture supplied by Peter Daniels, Salisbury.*



Throughout the 1840s the price of bread increased almost beyond the pockets of working people. There was a widespread fear of bread riots throughout the County. In 1847 Captain Meredith issued a Force order classified as 'Very Secret'. 'In the event of any Excitement or Disturbance taking place in this County in consequence of the present high price of provisions, the Superintendents will assemble the whole of their men and use every exertion to preserve the Peace sending an immediate express to me.'

With low wages and high bread prices it was hardly surprising that robbery was still a major crime. Highway robberies were commonplace. In January 1848 Meredith told his men 'Two highway robberies have recently been committed in this County at a very early hour in the evening. The Superintendents will direct their men to be out upon the roads by dusk on market nights or on fairs and to keep a strict watch upon all suspicious Parties reminding the constables that they are held responsible for the districts allocated to them and a Robbery committed therein will be considered as arising from great negligence on their part.'

Robberies and crimes during the winter months continued seemingly unabated. Accordingly men in the rural districts were ordered to commence duty at 9pm and patrol until 4am. Each man was expected to put in seven hours duty during the hours of darkness – and a total of 12 in every 24-hour period!

From 1839 to 1870, a total of 1,156 officers were appointed to serve in Wiltshire Constabulary. The majority had been born either in the Wiltshire or in an adjoining County. Their previous occupations included: 249 from other police forces, 249 skilled workers (such as carpenters, shoemakers etc.), 192 labourers, 114 from the army, 14 school teachers and clerks, one other (Queen of Spain's Service!).

During the same period many men left the Force. Reasons for leaving during the period were: 419 dismissed, 140 superannuated, 51 died in service and 31 left with a gratuity. Of the 419 officers who were dismissed, 114 involved drinking and 35 absconded. During the Constabulary's first 30 years 315 officers stayed for less than a year, including 117 who served for less than a month.

In November 1840 the Home Secretary approved the appointment of sergeants and inspectors to help the Superintendents in the unenviable task of running the Divisions. In August 1841, two grades of constable were adopted. Later Chief Constables would increase the sub division of the grade into five classes.

The welfare of constables was also considered. Those who were unable to work, through sickness, were retained on two-thirds pay, provided that a certificate was supplied by the Superintendent. Constables wounded or injured in the line of duty were entitled to full pay for a 'reasonable' period and a 'moderate' doctors bill was allowed. This was supplemented in May 1842 by the deduction of a penny a week from each man's pay to establish a medical fund for constables requiring treatment. This was invested in the Wiltshire Friendly Society, which then employed doctors to look after those of its members who were sick.

## RURAL CRIME IN THE 1850S

The 1850s were to see many new developments in the Wiltshire Constabulary. The Force had now been in existence for over ten years. Many other Forces were also being formed, contributing to a substantial body of collective knowledge and experience. Drawing on this experience, in 1857 the Chief Constable selected some of the more intelligent policemen to operate as detectives.

Many of the problems which ordinary policemen were experiencing were fairly mundane. Large numbers of sheep were kept in Wiltshire, making Salisbury Plain the centre of the Country's wool trade. Sheep stealing, for meat, was a regular occurrence throughout the period. In 1855, for instance, constables were told to call on all 'flock masters' once a month to ascertain the number of sheep in each flock.

There were also serious problems with travellers and tramps. Constables were advised always to be on the look out, with a view to 'moving them on'. Under an Act of Parliament, vagrants were to be apprehended. Failure to do so carried with it a fine of £25.

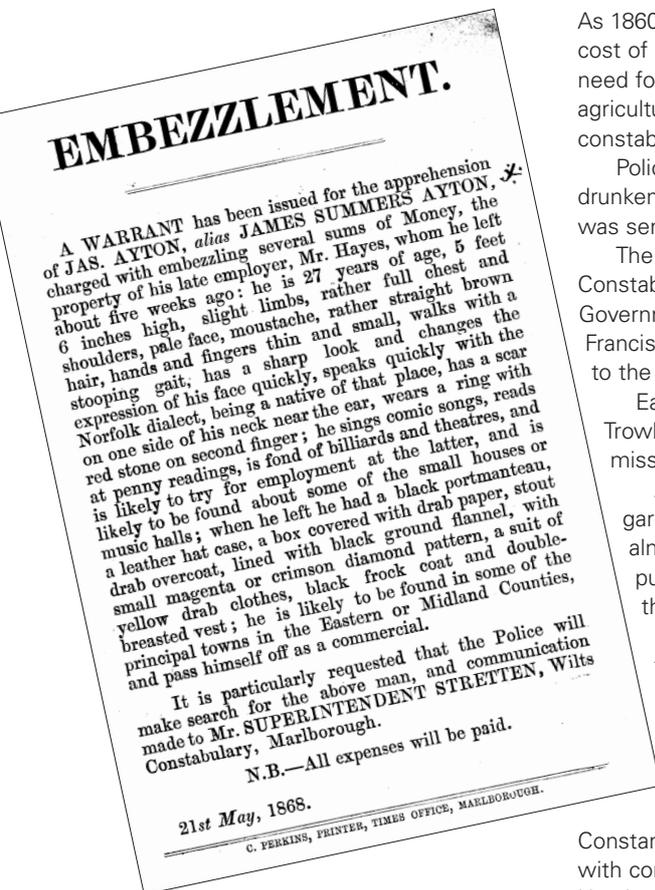
Devizes experienced crimes committed by passing narrow-boat crews. The Chief Constable records in February 1858 that constables should 'visit all lodgings houses and low public houses after 9pm and note any strangers whose movements are to be watched during the night. When boats are stopping overnight careful watch is to be kept on their crews and in the event of a robbery the whole of the boats in immediate vicinity are to be carefully searched.'

The Chief Constable was a fairly remote and awe inspiring character. From time to time he visited the Superintendents and their men at Divisional Headquarters. The constables would be drawn up in single file to be inspected in their appropriate uniforms. After an inspection of the men the Chief Constable then went to the office where the Superintendent would bring to his attention anything which required his decision or investigation. Inspectors, Sergeants and constables were then invited to 'prefer any applications or representation they may have to make.' After this, station books were examined and then the Chief Constable inspected the cottages, cells, horses, stables and stores. His inspection finished by checking that the standard weights and measures, held and used in those days by the police, were all present and correct.

Training began in earnest in November 1855, with a direction that Superintendents should ensure the supervision and training of several young and inexperienced constables who had recently joined the Force. Each man had to have a memorandum book and black lead pencil and the new constables were told that they could not expect promotion until they could write a proper letter.

The decade ended with renewed public order problems. Superintendent Foley was particularly mentioned by the Chief Constable for his work in arresting one of the ringleaders of a riot at Calne in May 1859. Little did the Chief Constable know that within a matter of months Wiltshire Constabulary and Superintendent John Foley would be catapulted into the public eye through their involvement in the Rode Hill House murder investigation.

## A CRIME WHICH PUZZLED A NATION



An early 'Wanted' poster.

Supplied by Wiltshire County Archives.

As 1860 began, the Chief Constable was reporting to the Police Committee that the cost of frock coats and dress trousers were rising. The length of beards and the need for haircuts were at the top of the agenda. In addition, markets and agricultural sales were clearly proving too much of temptation for some constables. Several had been found drunk at them.

Police Constable James Alley, of Salisbury Division, was found guilty of drunkenness, neglect, violation of his duty and disobedience to his superior. He was sentenced to one month's imprisonment.

The Rode Hill House murder drew public attention to the work of Wiltshire Constabulary. The occupants of the house were Mr. Samuel Kent and his family. A Government Factory Inspector, Mr. Kent lived with his second wife, their son Francis, and the children from his first marriage. The family had recently moved to the area.

Early on the morning of Friday 29th June 1860 Mr. Samuel Kent drove to Trowbridge to report that his three and a half year-old son, Francis, had been missing from his bed since early in the morning.

A few hours later the body of Francis, was found in the privy in the gardens of the house. His throat had been cut from ear to ear; the head had almost been severed. There was also a stab wound in the chest. One puzzling feature however, was the absence of blood in the privy and the fact that there was bruising around the child's mouth.

The Kents were not liked locally. Soon after his arrival at Rode Hill, on the Wiltshire/Somerset border, the father had prosecuted several of his new neighbours for trespass. It was claimed that he had been consistently unfaithful to his first wife. Soon after her death he had married the family nurse.

The youngest child of the first marriage was Constance, a strong willed girl who had once run away to Bath with her brother. At best, Constance was ignored by her father and stepmother. At worst, she was treated with contempt. By contrast, the new child, Francis, was favoured by the parents. He shared a room with his nurse.

At first Superintendent Foley investigated the grounds of the house, where Mr. Kent insisted that he would find the cause of the crime. It was some time before the police gained entry to the house and were able to continue their investigations inside.

These events indicate the social attitudes of the police at the time. Police officers still looked towards the gentry for advice and direction when dealing with serious crime and some were unsure of their powers when dealing with a case of this nature. The case was complicated by the fact that, as well as the police inquiry, the Coroner was investigating the death and the local Magistrates had set up a committee to look into the matter.

During the early part of the investigation, a heavily blood stained night dress was found lodged in a chimney in the house. Superintendent Foley ordered that this should be replaced so that a watch could be kept on it. It was hoped that the murderer would return to destroy the evidence. The plan went wrong when the two constables ordered to watch over the scene were locked into the kitchen. Before they were released the night dress had vanished.

Needless to say, Foley was afraid that the incompetence of the officers might result in punishment. Consequently he neglected to inform the authorities of the find and its subsequent disappearance. Although he suspected Mr. Kent, Foley was probably in awe of a man whom he saw as a social superior.

Because Foley's enquiries were unsuccessful, Detective Inspector Whicher, from the Metropolitan Police, took charge. He had distinguished himself in a number of important investigations – but this was to be his last case.

Whicher suspected that Constance had the motive. After all, she disliked her stepmother, and murdering the child would have enabled her to obtain her revenge. Constance was also known to be temperamental – as was shown by her flight to Bath.

Whicher had only one major clue. Constance had lost one of her three night dresses. Her explanation was that it had been mislaid in the wash. Moments before the laundry had been collected, she had sent the maid away on an errand. This would have given Constance the opportunity to take anything she wanted from the basket. The maid later said there had been nothing strange about the clothes – none had been blood stained.

Whicher believed that Constance had murdered the little boy and had stained her nightclothes with blood. She had hidden the nightdress and now needed to explain its disappearance. She took her second nightdress from the drawer to wear and put the third into the laundry basket. The third had been seen in the basket by the maid prior to her departure on the errand for Constance. While the maid was away, Constance had the opportunity to return the still clean nightdress to her drawer. The basket then went off to the laundry – the maid unaware that the nightdress had been removed and the alibi was complete.

Whicher arrested Constance but she would not admit to the crime. She was released on bail by the Magistrates. Foley suppressed additional evidence, like the nightdress, that may have helped convict her.

Obstructed at every step of his investigation, Whicher returned to London. He resigned from the Metropolitan Police shortly afterwards. Four years later, his suspicions were confirmed when Constance confessed to the murder of her baby stepbrother. She was sentenced to penal servitude for life but was released after twenty years. Doubts still remain about the case. Some people believe that Constance had shielded her father. The case is well documented in a number of books\*.

\*For more information visit [www.askwhy.co.uk/awfrome/rodemurder.html](http://www.askwhy.co.uk/awfrome/rodemurder.html)  
“The Step Daughter’s Revengue: Constance Kent’s confession, Katherine Garvin, in The Fifty Most Amazing Crimes of The Last Hundred Years, Ed JM Parish and JR Crosland Oldhams Press, London 1936”

## POLICING AND SANITATION IN THE 1860S

In the year that Constance made her confession, it is wise to remember that Wiltshire Constabulary consisted of only two hundred men.

Any level of sickness within the Force was clearly a problem, with many men calling on the aid of the Wiltshire Friendly Society funds were depleted, requiring a membership drive among younger members of the Force in 1861. In the following year 'fever' became prevalent, due to the unsatisfactory nature of the local water supply and the primitive system of drainage and sewage disposal in the police stations.

Superintendents were instructed to see that the drains, privies and water closets in their stations were kept clean. They were also told to ensure that a good supply of water was in the tanks to enable them to flush the water closets in the cells at least once a day.

As well as being on the look out for disease among the general population, the Constabulary was also responsible for keeping an eye out for contagious diseases among animals – a role that continued into the twentieth century. An outbreak of cattle disease in the spring of 1866 caused considerable trouble for the Force. The speed in communicating information about new outbreaks was aided by new technology. Messages from Superintendents to Police Headquarters were now being transmitted from Divisional Headquarters to Police Headquarters by telegraph.

A rise in crime, particularly robberies, increasingly taxed the minds of the Wiltshire Police. Theirs was still largely a preventive role, with Chief Constable Meredith instructing constables in the towns to 'commence their night duty at dusk during the winter months and continue patrolling until midnight.'

Horse stealing was common. Horses were as valuable in those days as our cars today. The increase in horse stealing showed, said Meredith, 'a want of vigilance on the part of those whose duty it is to protect the public'. In future, he added, 'Constables would go to the scene of a horse theft and ascertain, by tracking the footmarks, in which direction the animal had gone.'

Constables were told to follow the tracks with the greatest care, sending Superintendents information so that a message could be relayed on to neighbouring counties 'particularly where there are or will be fairs.'

As the 1860s ended, public order offences were on the increase. The high price of provisions was again causing discontent among the poorer members of society, and constables were advised to be on the look out for unrest. Captain Meredith was coming to the end of his tenure and Wiltshire Constabulary was coming to the end of an era.

## CAPTAIN STERNE TAKES COMMAND

Meredith retired in 1870 and an Acting Chief Constable was required until a permanent successor was chosen. This task fell to Superintendent Thomas Stretton, operating from Marlborough. Because of the additional responsibility Stretton applied for a pay rise. This was refused.

Captain Robert Sterne RN was selected as the next Chief Constable. His administrative headquarters were at Northgate House, opposite the Court House at Devizes.

One of Sterne's first tasks was to report on the state of the Force. As part of this process, an enquiry was initiated into the duties of all police officers. It was discovered that his coachman was counted as part of the Force and the clerk was rated as a Superintendent. In those days, when a horse was kept for the use of a Superintendent, a constable usually acted as a groom. Sterne hit the Force like a whirlwind. As the health of the previous Chief Constable had declined, he had become less and less active. The morale of the Force had suffered. In thirty years Captain Meredith had issued a total of 284 orders and memos. In the first nine months of 1870 Sterne would issue fifty-seven alone!

The railway was now well developed across the County, linking many of the towns and villages. Until the railways came to town, lack of transport had meant that many of the crimes had been committed by local felons. Now criminals could come and go at will – sometimes operating dozens of miles from home!

To help combat these newly mobile criminals, Sterne decreed that the morning and evening trains should be met each day by the district constable, who would note any suspicious strangers. Failure to be at the railway station was a very serious offence.

In January 1871, 1st Class Constable Smith was commended for displaying 'great zeal, intelligence and activity in tracing and arresting in London a fowl thief who stole poultry from the Collingbourne/Tidworth area and took them by train from Andover to London.' He was promoted to 2nd Class Sergeant and was awarded £3 at the Quarter Sessions.

The theft of poultry was a common occurrence. Any undetected offences of fowl stealing were noted down against the record of the constable on whose beat it occurred. Sterne warned that this information would be taken into consideration when the constable was recommended for promotion.

Like Meredith before him, Sterne found drunkenness among police officers a real problem. One of his first acts was to reprimand 2nd Class Constable Stephen Maslen, a constable with 26 years service, for drunkenness. The man was reduced to 4th Class Constable and fined a week's pay. It wasn't long before Maslen was back in front of Sterne for drunkenness. This time he was dismissed from the Force. Despite the strict punishment handed out, nineteen cases of drunkenness were reported between April 1870 and April 1871.

Sterne conducted a tour of inspection in February 1871. Malmesbury was the cleanest of the new police stations, while Trowbridge was the dirtiest. Of the old stations, Marlborough was 'very clean and well kept including the tramps ward.' Devizes was also clean but there was 'room for improvement in the cottages etc.'.

Sterne was keen to ensure that he got value for money from his men. Superintendents were reminded to visit each of the constables under their command each month. The visits were to be made without warning between the hours of 8pm and 4am – to ensure that night duties were being carried out properly.

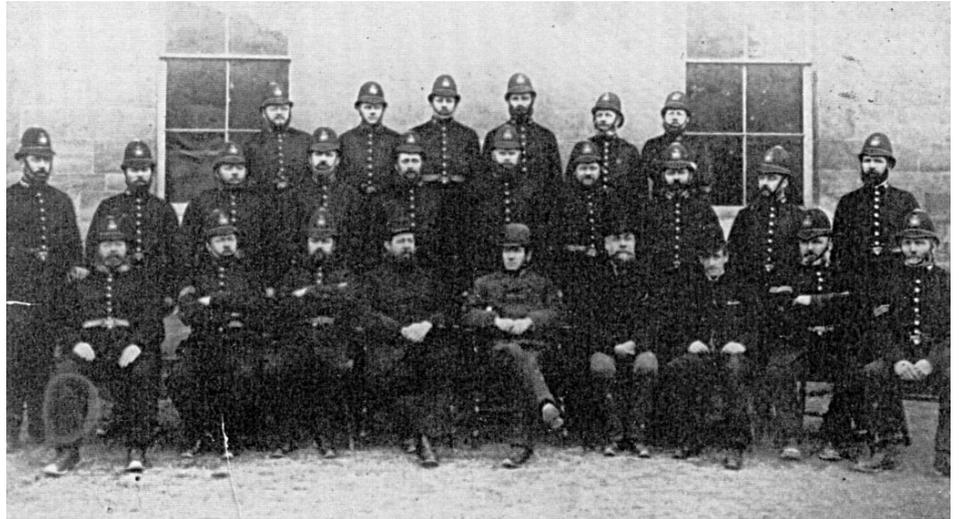
With the gentry paying for the police out of their rates, Sterne was keen to keep up appearances. In 1870 it was decided to take complaints made against the police more seriously and a standard form was circulated to stations to be filled in when a complaint was received.



**Sergeant Rich, just after his promotion. The uniform shown was introduced in 1872. The hats were a source of ridicule among small boys, until a conventionally shaped helmet replaced them in 1879. Notice the well-worn boots.**

**Taken in 1887, this photograph is believed to show Chief Constable Sterne**

*Picture supplied by Wiltshire County Archives.*



It wasn't just the constables who required close scrutiny. In 1870 Captain Sterne told Superintendent Wolfe, of Salisbury Division: 'On examining Sergeant Johnson's journal at Shrewton yesterday I find you have not paid him a night visit since you have taken charge of the Salisbury Division and as there is evidently some evil disposed person or persons in or about that neighbourhood you will pay one night visit every week between the hours of 10pm and 2am until the malicious destruction of fowls and shrubs in that neighbourhood is satisfactorily cleared up, stating in the column of remarks of your weekly report in red ink the full particulars of your visits and the hour you were at Shrewton.'

On another occasion Sterne told another Superintendent: 'Within the last two months you have allowed two cases of housebreaking and one case of sheep stealing to go undetected in your Division which is very discreditable to you as a Superintendent of Police and it is very clear to me that there is a screw loose somewhere. If matters do not improve I shall be compelled to make several changes in your Division before long.'

The essentially rural nature of the majority of Wiltshire was reflected in PC Hearl's journal for 1879 and 1880, referred to elsewhere, in which he lists offences he has dealt with. These included 6 offences of animals straying, 1 assault, 1 breaking and entering a shop, 2 poaching, 1 leaving engines unattended and 1 case of 'unjust scales.'

On 25th January 1874, PC James Drake of Trowbridge was called to an address to deal with an allegation of theft. The self confessed thief was just 13 years old. She was charged and convicted of feloniously stealing a pig's foot from her employer, to the value of 2d, 'against the peace of our Lady the Queen'. The case was heard at the Magistrates Court the following day and the child sentenced to 14 days imprisonment with hard labour, to be followed by two years in the Reformatory School.

From time to time children indulge in fads and fashions. During the last century yo-yos and hoops were very popular. In several places, boys and girls were playing with hoops in the road, a very dangerous practice even before the advent of the motorcar. The Chief Constable called his Superintendents together and told them to take whatever action was necessary to stop 'a practise which is most dangerous to both life and limb.'

The gentry still regarded tramps and beggars as a nuisance. In June 1871 Sterne ordered that one man in each sub division should patrol his beat in plain clothes to detect beggars and to make enquiries about vagrants at local cottages.

Sterne's instructions were that once a constable knew in which direction a tramp was heading, he should cut across Country ahead of the tramp to intercept him in the act of begging. The benefit, said Sterne, would be shown in a reduction of cottage burglaries.

New uniforms were introduced during the 1870s, with new hats being introduced, to be worn night and day. Old pattern hats were retained for use by the men when on plain-clothes duty. A new hat for Superintendents was also introduced. The new uniform was to be worn on Sundays, at the Assizes, Quarter Sessions, Petty Sessions, Fetes and Inspections. Helmets were issued in 1879.

## THE DIARY OF A RURAL POLICE OFFICER

George Phillips was born at Whiteparish, near Salisbury, on the 6th July 1857. He was the youngest child of a local gamekeeper and the family were reasonably well off. Young George started work at fourteen. His first job was as a wood carter, but he later turned his hand to gamekeeping. He eventually decided that neither job was to his taste. At the age of nineteen, he joined the police force.

George Phillips wrote his autobiography entirely in shorthand. It is from these notes that the following episodes are taken.

'Having procured the necessary certificate of character, etc, on 16th July 1875 I went to Devizes and made application to the Chief Constable of Wilts, Captain Sterne. I was told to go at once to the Doctor and having passed, the Chief Constable asked me if I was prepared to take it on at once. I told him I was, and so without waiting a day, I took on the same day as I made the application.'

'As was the case with all recruits, I had to remain at the Head Quarters Police Station, Devizes for a month to learn my drill and be instructed in police duties. I thought this jolly fun. I had no duty to do as the day happened to be the very time when the Chief had his leave and by giving the drill instructor a treat now and then I had but a very little drill to do, and as to the instructions, to tell the truth this was nothing but the copying of a printed book with some of the greatest humbug I have ever seen. It was called the class book.'

Phillips became "PC 6" and was sent to Melksham to begin his career as a rural policeman. He lodged with Inspector Baldwin and his wife.

'I shall never forget the first few weeks and especially the night duty. We were at this time working the twelve hours system; there were two men kept in Melksham besides the Inspector, and every other night we took on night duty from ten till six.'

Early in his service, Phillips was responsible for apprehending a man for beating up his wife. The prisoner was sentenced to eight months hard labour and Phillips was commended.

While at Melksham a terrible fire occurred at a rope, twine and sail factory. Phillips had just gone off duty and was dozing off to sleep when he heard cries of 'Fire'.

He took the keys to the fire engine house from the police station. Moments later the first fireman arrived, and together they dragged the engine onto the road. By the time they got to the fire, Phillips recalled:

'It was raging terribly, there were two large workshops on fire and as there was a very large quantity of gas tar used in the sail making shop, the flames were like great clouds of fire flying all about and near the buildings that it was almost impossible to get near enough with the hoses to play on the fire, and this was not the worst of a bad job for between those two burning masses the engine had to go before it could get to the canal for a supply of water.'

'There was only one way to get it there and in this one opening the flames would nearly meet when a gush of wind blew in that direction. None of the firemen seemed inclined to go through. It was dangerous to delay as there was a long row of dwelling houses in immediate danger, in fact the people were already removing their furniture for fear of the fire.'

Phillips records that he asked why the firemen were standing by and not taking the engine through (fire engines were pulled either by men or horses). He was told that it was too hot. 'Who on earth would go through there?' asked the Captain. George Phillips answered: 'I will for one! Who goes with me?'

He continued: 'This seemed to put some spirit in the men, and the Captain's son said 'I will go with you Phillips.' I caught hold of the handle on one side and he on the other and getting the engine up to a good run we were through the other side in a great deal less time than it takes me to write it in these pages, the firemen gave us a good cheer for our pluck.'



Police Constable George Phillips.

The fire was not under control until the middle of the following day and the side of Phillips' helmet was so severely burnt that he could only use it at night – when no one could see the scorching. He was given a reward of 7/6d (thirty seven and a half pence).

After a year Superintendent White put Phillips in charge of his own district. He took charge of one of the best areas in the County at Southwick. It was two miles from the Divisional Headquarters at Trowbridge. While there he fell in love with Ellen Doel, the daughter of farmer Doel, from Blue Barn Farm at Southwick. They married on 22nd November 1876. Soon afterwards Phillips was moved to Castle Eaton, near Swindon.

Phillips was eventually promoted to First Class Constable on 1st August 1880, at Bulford. A few months later, on Tuesday January 18th 1881, the South of England experienced a terrible blizzard, which brought chaos to much of Wiltshire. It was the severest storm for forty years.

Police Constable Phillips records that the snow drifted to a depth of twelve to fifteen feet in places. Carriers from the villages were snowed in at Salisbury for four days, and the Great Western Railway was completely blocked two miles out of Warminster. A passenger died from exposure attempting to walk back to the station from the train. Police Constable Phillips recalls 'A man named Ferris lost his life whilst returning from Pewsey to Netheravon with a wagon and horses.'

The most notable incident during his years of service was the manslaughter of a Gypsy woman at Amesbury. At 10pm one night in October 1879 Sergeant Pottow and Police Constable Phillips met at Ratfyn Farm, Amesbury. It was a very cold night, with frost on the ground. They heard screaming and shouting about half a mile down the road and went to investigate.

When the two officers reached the road they discovered that the noise had come from Gypsies camping on a piece of wasteland by the roadside. By now the encampment was quiet. A cart was parked alongside the Gypsy tent and everyone inside pretended to be asleep. George Frankham and his common-law wife Elizabeth White had a sizeable family with them. Henry White, Elizabeth's brother, was also there.

Sergeant Pottow recognised them as being the same family who had passed through Amesbury that afternoon. He noticed, however, that a woman was now missing from the group. Pottow shook Henry White to wake him up. 'Where is your woman, White?' he demanded. The disheveled Gypsy said he didn't know.

Pottow told Phillips to walk back towards Amesbury to see what he could find. Phillips set off, guided by the meager light from his lantern. He found the missing woman a quarter of a mile further on. She was lying by the side of the road and had been badly beaten up.

'There she lay almost naked (the only cover was an old sack thrown across her legs). The clothes she had on could not be called clothes in the simplest meaning of the word, as it was not sufficient to cover her. On her bosom lay a young child about six months old, on speaking to her she feigned to be asleep. I called to Sergeant Pottow and we succeeded at last to rouse her, she was very weak and could scarcely walk.'

Within a few minutes White appeared and Sergeant Pottow immediately demanded to know what White had done to the woman. White replied that he had done nothing. In that case, asked Sergeant Pottow, how was it that she could hardly walk when she had been all right in Amesbury only a few hours before?

Sergeant Pottow suggested that the woman be taken to a doctor. However, she claimed that she had drunk too much and had fallen down. Both officers believed that there had been a fight – but neither had seen it and they couldn't insist that the woman visit the doctor with them.

Phillips thought nothing more of the matter until 8pm the following evening. He was patrolling Bulford in plain clothes and stopped to smoke his pipe at a cross roads near the downs. After a minute or two White and his sister ran up to him.

The female told him that the beaten woman he had found the night before was dead. Phillips dashed home to change into his uniform and collect his lamp. On the way to the scene PC Phillips suggested to Henry White that he had beaten the woman up, but White maintained they had been drunk and she had fallen over several times.

The corpse was under a hedge about four or five yards from the tents. It was put into a cart and a donkey was harnessed to take the body to the Union Workhouse in Amesbury. White was told to lead the donkey.

On the way to Amesbury, the tragic entourage was met Sergeant Pottow and a doctor – who examined the corpse. On arrival at Amesbury Police Station, White was charged with the willful murder of the woman. At the workhouse the following day an inquest was opened and adjourned. The Whites and George Frankham were taken to Salisbury and charged before the Magistrates.

White was accused of murder and the other two with aiding and abetting. The charge was later reduced to manslaughter against White, while the others were discharged. The Coroner's jury also returned a verdict of manslaughter against White. Two labourers had witnessed White beating the woman on the same night she was found injured.

A search of the area produced nothing but a broken hoe handle, which may or may not have been used against the woman. White was duly committed for trial. He was found guilty and sentenced to fifteen years penal servitude.

Police Constable Phillips was posted to Minety, near Malmesbury, on Tuesday November 17th 1883. The village had 876 inhabitants – mainly freeholders occupying small dairy farms. 'They are very independent and a difficult class to deal with,' recalled Phillips. The village was served by four public houses.

'To begin the day I had to meet the two first trains in plain clothes, the first was due at 9.27 and the next at 10.19. After this I could have a look round the district. In the evening I had two more trains to meet, one at 7.30 and the last at 8.30. After this I had my night meeting to attend, some times one and some times two, but I never had to attend one after 12 midnight. Some of the meetings were nearly five miles away. Then I had to attend the monthly market at Malmesbury in plain clothes, and of course other duty such as the rural police has always to perform.'

Phillips left Minety on 14th April 1887 after a serious disagreement with his Sergeant, which ended in disciplinary proceedings before the Chief Constable, Captain Sterne. When he left Minety the local population obviously held him in some affection. They clubbed together to buy a clock to present to him; however the Chief Constable would not let Phillips accept it.

He was sent to Dilton Marsh – only four miles from his wife's home at Southwick – and the family was much happier there. Sadly, George Phillips concluded his story in July 1887. He continued to serve in the Force, was promoted to sergeant and retired on a pension in January 1904.

## LONG HOURS AND LOW LIFE

The 1880s heralded the birth of a rotational system of duty. In October 1880 the need to patrol late at night was reiterated by the Chief Constable. Many men found the conditions difficult

Elsewhere, industrial workers were agitating for better working conditions. Police officers too were concerned about their own working hours. There were calls for reform. In response, officers were instructed to go to bed at 10pm every other night, and rise to patrol from 2am until daylight, keeping conference with their neighbouring officers at 4am.

The Chief Constable gave an example. 'Supposing there is a Sergeant and two police constables in a Sub Division, two are always on the new duty – the third patrolling the early part, i.e. up to 11 pm and then to bed: thus giving each man two nights in bed a week.'

A year later more significant changes were made. Police constables had previously been on duty for twelve hours in every twenty-four. Now they were expected to serve nine hours in every twenty-four, five hours of which were to be performed between the hours of 10pm and 4am.

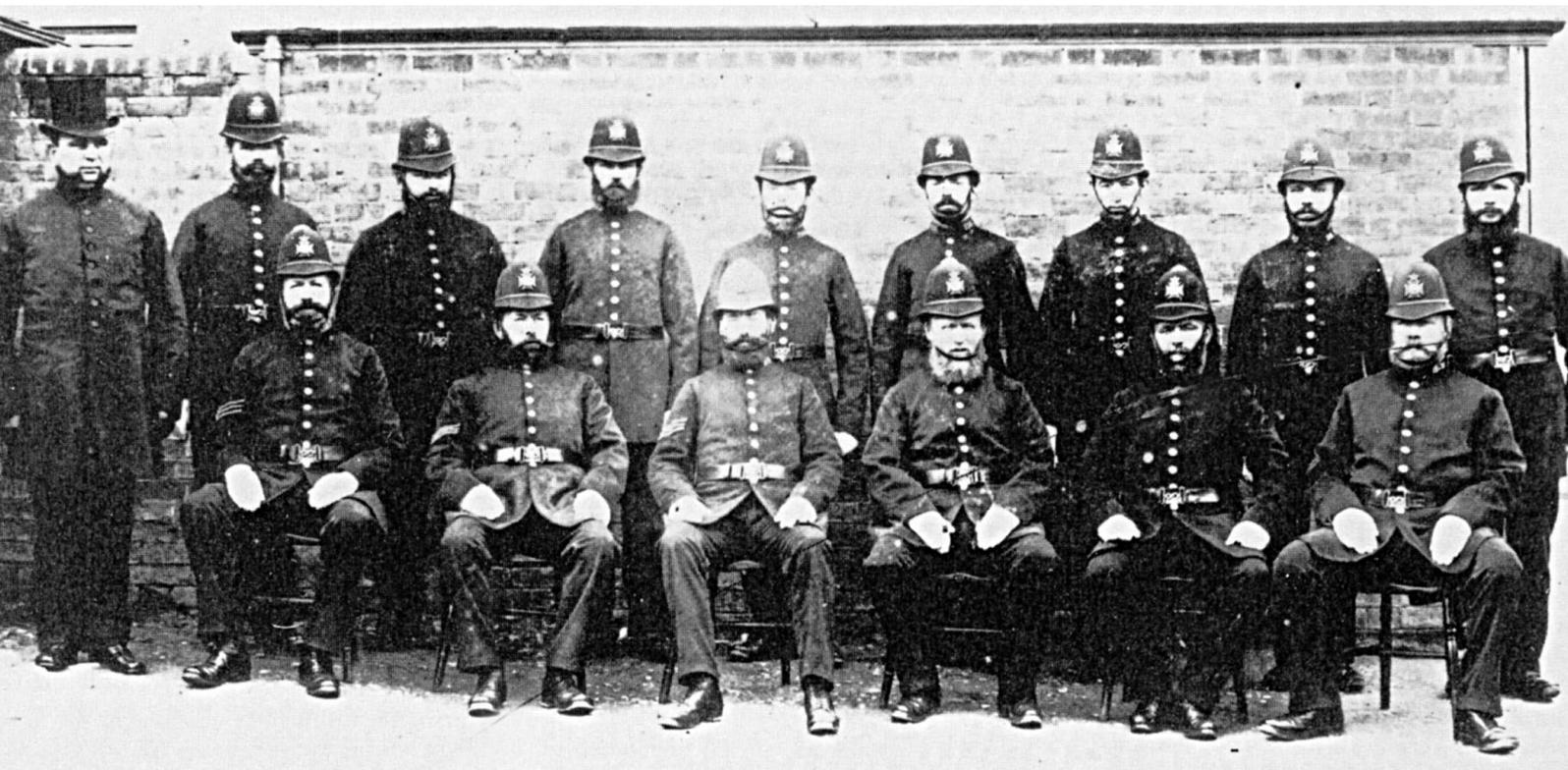
Violence continued to be a major concern for the police. Officers were often sent to deal with difficult incidents. Many, no doubt, were provoked. Sometimes violence was perpetrated by officers themselves.

In August 1882 a police constable was convicted of assaulting a corporal at a public house in Wilton. The police officer had been called to the premises to clear the inn of a number of roughs – including the corporal. In his enthusiasm, the constable drew his staff (or truncheon) and struck the corporal. Captain Sterne used the opportunity to remind his men about the use of the staff.

'From evidence, no doubt the police constable was greatly provoked but was not assaulted. The staff should only be used in self-defence. The attention of all is drawn to this.' The police constable concerned had already been punished by the Magistrates, added Captain Sterne, consequently the officer would be reprimanded and cautioned.

**A Divisional photograph in the 1880s shows clearly the fashion for beards and moustaches of the time. General force orders were issued regarding the length of hair and the style of facial hair to be worn!**

*Picture supplied by Wiltshire Constabulary.*



A similar incident occurred in March 1885 when an Inspector at Marlborough struck a local man named Taylor with his fist. The Inspector was convicted and fined 101 shillings – a very sizeable sum in those days. Captain Sterne warned his men that they should all control their temper and never strike members of the public except in self-defence.

In 1884 whistles were issued to the constables on duty in the principal towns. The idea was that a constable could summon help from his neighbouring colleague in times of distress or emergency. Each station was issued with a supply of whistles – but not enough for each constable. Sets of instructions were also issued for the use of the whistle. 'When requiring the assistance of a second constable take the whistle and place it in the mouth between the teeth thus giving the constable the use of both hands to secure his prisoner or protect himself and continue to blow it until assistance arrives and it is my direction that any officer or constable on hearing the sound of the police whistle is immediately to proceed to the place from whence the sound comes'.

The Chief Constable wrote to his Force in December 1885 to congratulate them on their conduct during the General Election. The Force had been called out night after night to attend political meetings at which feelings were running high. Great tact had been exercised by the men and only one complaint had been made about the way in which the police had performed their duty.

Elections could put officers into situations requiring great tact and diplomacy. In 1887 constables were told that they were not to 'vote at any election of a member to serve in Parliament, nor in any manner endeavour to persuade any elector to give, or dissuade any elector from giving his vote for such a purpose (Penalty £20).' However, no sooner were these instructions published, than an act of Parliament invalidated the rules against police officers voting in Parliamentary elections.

In April 1887, Captain Sterne issued 'Standing Orders and Instructions for the Government of the Wiltshire Constabulary with a digest of Statutes.' The 106-page document, which was approved by the Court of Quarter Sessions on 5th April 1887, was printed at the Gazette Office at Devizes. Copies of the book were delivered to the Divisions. Each officer was told to read and learn the instructions within it. Officers were warned: 'no constable will be considered eligible for advancement who does not possess a thorough knowledge of his instructions'.

The Standing Orders decreed a constable 'shall not marry without first obtaining the permission of the Chief Constable'. Permission would be given if the constable 'can show he is in a position to furnish his cottage without running into debt, and that his intended wife is of good character.'

One of the first moves towards community safety and crime prevention was demonstrated in April 1888. Sterne told his Superintendents that a gang of burglars was likely to visit the Country districts soon.

'You will instruct men of your division to pay particular attention to all strangers, to be particular in attending the first and last trains and to inform clergy and gentry living on their beats that I would be much obliged by their seeing their doors and windows secure and by their leaving about at night as few valuables as possible.'

It would be another 100 years before Neighbourhood Watch schemes appeared in those same villages!



**Sergeant Henry Field of Trowbridge in the 1880s. He went on to become a Superintendent at Marlborough and died in 1921. He was known for his 'irascibility and carriage'.**

*Photograph supplied by Alec Huntley, Pewsey.*

## **A PROBATIONER'S JOURNAL**

William Hearl joined Wiltshire Constabulary on the 7th December 1878. After training at Devizes, he was sent to Chippenham Division and was posted to the North Wraxall station. In July 1879, he moved to Castle Combe and moved again on the 15th November 1882 to Keevil, which was then within the Devizes Division. He was promoted to Merit Class Constable on the 1st March 1888.

His journal survives to this day and provides a unique insight into the way in which constables were trained at Police HQ. The technique of copying down the Conditions of Service and Force Orders owe much to the schoolroom practice of the time – copying a 'master' text word for word, line by line. His very first task was to copy out his oath of allegiance:

*'I William Hearl, do swear that I will well and truly serve our Sovereign Lady the Queen in the office of constable for the County of Wilts. Without favour or affection malice or ill will and that I will to the best of my power cause the peace to be kept and preserved and prevent all offences against the persons and property of Her Majesty's Subjects and that while I continue to hold the said office I will to the best of my skill and knowledge discharge all the duties thereof faithfully according to Law.'*

His next responsibility was to record the Conditions of Service under which he had been appointed. The first paragraph of the Conditions conclude that the "[Conditions of Service]...are here stated that no future complaint may be made upon their being enforced."

The discipline was uncompromising. PC Hearl's Conditions decreed that he was to serve and reside where directed, obey all lawful orders, not get into debt, pay deductions towards the superannuation fund and refrain from political activity.

Hearl was to be employed on probation 'for as long as the Chief Constable shall think fit'. He was warned that any portion of his pay could be stopped 'at the pleasure of the Chief Constable' for taking leave or being off sick. He was liable to instant dismissal if he married without first obtaining the permission of the Chief Constable.

Having been advised as to his Conditions of Service, PC Hearl's next task was to copy the latest Force Standing Orders, of which there were 17. The orders were drawn up by the Chief Constable and would have had a considerable impact on PC Hearl's daily life. The Standing Orders of 1870 regulated the wearing of uniform, no smoking in public and the return of clothing on leaving the Force. Four of the rules dealt with standing to attention and saluting officers when addressing them and 'other people of note'. Other rules concerned:

- the amount to be deducted from a retiring officer's wages to pay for alterations to his uniform so that it would fit his successor;
- restrictions on the carrying of walking sticks, and;
- whenever members of the Force passed through Devizes, whether on duty or on leave, 'they will not fail to report themselves at the Chief Constable's Office';
- shaving every morning and preventing any 'eccentric peculiarity of beard'.

An officer's uniform and equipment needed to be cared for properly. Four pages of the journal dealt with how these items were to be maintained. These are reproduced below:

### **TREATMENT OF UNIFORM AND APPOINTMENTS**

#### **WILTSHIRE CONSTABULARY 1870**

##### **Hats**

1. Felt hats are to be cleaned with a clothes brush when dry and dusty.
2. To clean the band binding and chin strap this must first be damped over with a bit of chamois leather dipped in clean water then rubbed dry with a clean cloth as soon as possible which will produce a bright polish on the leather. The inside of the hat must also be rubbed round with a clean cloth.
3. When wet from rain the hat should be brushed dry with a clean clothes brush and again brushed when dry.
4. When not in use the hats are to be hung up and on no account whatever to be laid down upon either the crown or the brim

##### **Metal Numbers**

1. When the metal ornaments of the tunic collar (sic) require cleaning they must be removed from the collar: the collar should then be brushed clean before putting on the ornaments again.
2. The fastenings of the metal ornaments must be very often looked to: as Constables who loose their numbers etc. will have to pay for new ones.

**Silver Buttons**

1. Silver buttons must be cleaned with a brush and button stick and a little plate powder mixed with clean water warm or cold. N. B. Never spit in the paste as spittle being often greasy causes the powder to clog on the crown of the button.

**Tunic and Trousers**

1. Cloth clothes should never be hung up or laid where they will get dusty.
2. Cloth clothes that are put away into drawers or trunks must always be folded up smooth after having been well brushed, and constables must always brush their clothes before turning out on duty.
3. In muddy weather cloth clothes should always be well dried before cleaning. Muddy cloth should be well rubbed between the...and then well shaken before being brushed.

**Great Coats**

1. The imbroidered (sic) Nos. on the great coat collors (sic) should be kept clean and white, a little pipe clay moistened with warm water should be laid on with a small bit of clean flannel or brush and when quite dry should be brushed off very gently with a clean brush.

**Capes**

2. The capes must not be kept constantly folded or rolled up when not in use as they are apt to crack at the creases: they should from time to time be rubbed over with sweet oil and be thrown over a clothes line or horse.

**Leggings**

1. The leggings require the same treatment as the capes.

**Belts and Cases**

1. No oil or grease is ever to be used upon the waistbelts nor any composition but ordinary blacking: the inside of the belts should be rubbed clean also.
2. The silver clasp and buckle must be kept bright with whitening: the buckle is always to be worn about two inches from the right hand button in the waist in the back.

**Handcuffs**

1. The handcuffs must be kept bright with silver sand or bath brick and must always be kept unlocked in the pouch ready for immediate use.

**Lanterns**

1. The lanterns must be kept very clean inside and out: and the reflectors polished with whitening.

The instructions laid out for care of the uniform would have ensured a smart turn-out at the nightly 'conference point' meetings. PC Hearl's journal records that all constables were required to meet their supervisors and constables on neighbouring beats on a daily basis. In the days before telegraph, telephone, wireless or radio communications these meetings ensured that patrols were being undertaken as directed. It also provided the Force with a very effective method of communication, allowing information concerning crimes and incidents to be quickly exchanged.

PC Hearl's journal includes practical examples of report writing. He was instructed to copy reports concerning offences and arrests, warrants, lost property and animals; all occurrences that he could expect to come across during his career. A question and answer section dealt with other duties, such as dealing with a violent or sudden death, convening a Coroner's Jury, powers of entry and how to give (and what constitutes) evidence.

Legal training covered the definitions of crimes. The range of offences copied into his journal is extensive. The journal describes offences such as larceny, burglary and night poaching. It is difficult to see why he would need to know about regicide (the crime of killing a King) or lapidation (to kill by stoning).

Perhaps to ensure he was intellectually well equipped, PC Hearl also noted in alphabetical order, a list of words in common use, some French words, some Latin words and some prose, poetry and songs!

## BOMBS – REAL AND IMAGINED

Precautions were taken against Irish Republican bomb attacks long before the troubles of the modern era. The late 1870s and early 1880s were marked by a number of explosions on the British mainland. Practical jokers and hoaxers took advantage of the public concerns and 'Dynamite Outrages' became a worry for Salisbury City Police.

The attacks were planned by Irish Republicans, encouraged by a 'Skirmishing Fund', established in 1875 by Irish Americans living in New York. Their aim was 'to lay the big cities of England in ashes'. Bombs were planted in London, Glasgow, Liverpool and Dublin.

In 1882, the Bishop of Salisbury began to receive threatening letters from an unknown source. Then, in April, there were reports that an attempt had been made to blow up Salisbury Cathedral. It caused consternation among Salisbury inhabitants.

The device had been discovered by Police Constable Tomkins. While patrolling The Close, his attention had been drawn to a mysterious wooden box near the Cathedral wall. Other officers were called to the scene.

The box was fastened with two iron bands and six screws. A piece of paper was inserted in a 'touch hole' at the top. It was taken to the police station in Endless Street to be examined. The paper was covered with a white powder which exploded when tested.

When opened, the bomb was found to contain sawdust, mould and a little bottle labeled 'nitro-glycerine, to be kept in a cool place, and do not take out the cork.' The 'bomb' was actually a hoax and the bottle contained nothing more sinister than gum water.

Nevertheless, the threat was taken seriously by the Dean and Chapter, who offered a £50 reward for the capture of the prankster. For two years there were no more bombs.

But the peace was rudely shattered in July 1884, when an explosion occurred in Salisbury Market Place. The bomb contained a pound of gunpowder and was planted at the foot of a statue in front of the Guildhall. Another reward of £50 was offered, but no one came forward.

The third, and most serious, outrage was committed in Salisbury only a few months later – on the night of 27th September 1884. Shortly before 11 pm, as local traders were locking up their shops for the night, the peace was shattered by a tremendous explosion.

A canister had been planted outside the Guildhall. The explosion was sufficient to damage the exterior of the building and smashed fourteen panes of glass in the banqueting room. Shop windows across the street were also broken.

The explosion was so serious that the Chief Government Inspector of Explosives was summoned. He identified the explosive as a coarse form of blasting powder, and a reward of £200 was offered for information leading to an arrest.

The incident was beginning to fade from public memory when, on the evening of January 14th, 1885, Warminster Town Hall became the scene of the most serious bomb explosion. This time the damage was very considerable. Altogether 100 panes of glass were smashed. Pieces of lead and iron pipe were found as far as 60 yards from the scene of the explosion. The damage to the Town Hall was extensive. Part of the porch had been dislodged, while the railings and steps had been considerably blackened by the explosion.

The following day a number of prominent local inhabitants received anonymous letters threatening further violence if the search for the bombers continued. The major task of tracing the culprits fell to Superintendent Stephens. Together with Superintendent Matthews, of Salisbury City Police, he opened a joint investigation.

In April 1885, the police arrested seven local men who were believed to have assisted either directly or indirectly in the bombings. Five were later released as a result of confessions made by the remaining two. The defendants claimed that the explosions had been pranks. No harm had been intended and they did not belong to an Irish Republican group.

They were found guilty of the offences and sentenced to 12 months and two months respectively. During his summing up, Justice Fields told the court that he accepted that the two were 'motivated by a mischievous desire to alarm the public'.

## A SAD END TO THE CENTURY



**Police Constable Tom King pictured after joining the Force in 1897. He is wearing a mourning armband. Police Constable King was later promoted to Sergeant and was stationed at Castle Eaton, Wylve, Dilton Marsh, Highworth, Malmesbury and Ramsbury. He retired in 1927.**

*Picture supplied by Salisbury Divisional Police Headquarters.*

The new decade would be overshadowed by the murder of a police officer in 1892. However, the first events of the 1890 reflected the day-to-day routine of most County Constabularies.

The police had responsibilities under the Weights and Measures Act, enabling them to identify those traders who were defrauding their customers. The Chief Constable was concerned with efficiency and his Superintendents were instructed to advise him if they felt that reductions could be made in the number of men in each division. Changes in the population meant that new beats and stations were required.

The winter of 1890 was very severe and the snow lay thick on the ground. The Chief Constable decided that, with conditions so bad, it was senseless to hold officers to their night appointments. A month later, when the worst of the weather was over, they returned the normal routine of nightly conferences.

In January 1891, the Chief Constable asked that more details should be provided of areas in the County where crime was committed. A divisional register of crime was to be kept and submitted to the Chief Constable each year.

It wasn't long before the Melksham Division register recorded the shooting of a man in the town – followed only a few days later by the murder of Sergeant Molden, near Corsley, during an attempt to arrest the Melksham murder suspect.

## THE DEATH OF A HERO

The threat of the death penalty was no deterrent to the Wiltshire murderer John Gurd. When he shot two men dead, he knew he must certainly hang. He even pleaded guilty at the start of his trial, declaring 'I am quite willing to die for what I have done.'

Today clever defence lawyers would have pointed to his depression over a lost love and the disastrous drinking binge that ensued. They would probably have argued that John Gurd wasn't in control of his emotions.

Whatever the truth, Gurd sealed his own fate on the night he shot Sergeant Enos Molden of Wiltshire Constabulary, near Whitebourne Cottage, Warminster. His hanging on 26th July 1892 was greeted with public celebration.

The murderer had been an attendant at a lunatic asylum, where he had been engaged to the asylum's housemaid, Florence Adams. With only a week to go before their marriage, Florence discovered that Gurd owed money to some of the patients and several local tradesmen.

She broke off the engagement, and in a letter to her former fiancé, she explained the reason. Gurd was incensed, he owed little more than £3, and he began to look for scapegoats. Florence's uncle, Harry Richards, was an obvious contender. He had always been against the marriage and made no pretence of liking the young man. Gurd suspected that Richards was behind the letter. After brooding for three days, Gurd handed in his resignation at the asylum and returned to his family home in Shaftesbury.

Matters came to a head on Saturday 9th April 1892, when Gurd travelled back to Melksham to confront the uncle. He roamed the town looking for Richards and eventually discovered he was in a public house. Gurd paced up and down outside, resentment growing within him, until his target left the pub to walk home.

As Richards walked up Spa Road, the jilted man caught up, drew a revolver from his coat pocket and shot him twice in the back. A woman standing nearby saw everything. As Gurd turned on his heel and walked off, the mortally wounded man crawled towards her groaning in agony. The murder was immediately reported to the police, and the woman provided an excellent description.

Over the next few days a massive police hunt was mounted. Gurd was sighted at Bath and Frome, but finally gave away his whereabouts on the night of 12th April when he tried to gain entry to a pub at Corsley.

The licensee of the White Hart Inn was having an after hours 'lock-in'. Gurd demanded to be let in and hammered his fists on the door. No doubt thinking it was the local policeman; the publican nervously unlatched the bolt. Rather than finding an officer, he discovered Gurd. After days on the run, the murderer now resembled a vagrant. He was told to leave the premises in no uncertain terms.

The 'lock-in' resumed as the door was bolted. But within a few seconds a shot was heard outside. Everyone ran out, to discover that one of the tethered horses had been shot. A figure was seen hurrying into the distance.

The police soon arrived from Warminster and quickly established that the culprit was John Gurd. It was clear, from what the publican told them, that he was heading for Melksham. Superintendent Perrett, Sergeant Enos Molden and two constables hurried off in hot pursuit. Eventually they caught sight of a darkened and disheveled figure.

Hearing the approach of the officers, Gurd turned and shouted 'Do you want me, Sir? Here I am.' Superintendent Perrett replied that they wanted to speak to him in connection with a murder in Melksham. As he did so, one of the constables advanced to within a few feet of the murderer.

In desperation, Gurd drew the revolver from his pocket and aimed at the constable. It was too late; before he could fire, the constable had knocked him to the ground. The two wrestled, but Gurd managed to get a hand free. Still holding the revolver, he pointed it in the general direction of the others. Two shots were fired, one hitting Sergeant Molden squarely in the chest. The Sergeant collapsed and died shortly afterwards.



**The grave, at Warminster, of Sergeant Enos Molden, who was shot while attempting to arrest John Gurd on the night of 12th April 1892.**

*Picture supplied by Don Mulcock, Salisbury.*



**Sergeant David Pinnell and family pose for a group photograph at the turn of the Century.**

*Picture supplied by Jack Woodward, Malmesbury.*

By now Gurd had been overpowered and handcuffed by the Superintendent and the two constables. Once they had got their breath back, he was asked why he had shot the Sergeant. 'Because you did not give me time to shoot myself,' he replied.

Back at Warminster John Gurd was charged with the murder of Harry Richards and Sergeant Molden. Angry crowds surrounded the Town Hall at Trowbridge the following day, when he was committed for trial at Salisbury Assizes.

Public distaste was heightened by the revelation that the day after the murder, Sergeant Molden had been due to return to Shrewton. He had served for eleven years and was due to receive a testimonial and a marble clock from the villagers as a token of their respect.

A huge crowd attended the funeral at Christ Church, Warminster, where a memorial still stands. The mourners included 120 policemen, headed by the Chief Constable, followed by the cortege and a band.

Gurd was tried in front of one of the sternest judges of the day, Mr. Justice Charles. From early morning crowds gathered around Salisbury's Guildhall, and a police cordon was formed to prevent 'all and sundry' gaining admission to the courthouse.

The proceedings began with Gurd being asked whether he pleaded guilty or not guilty to the charges. To the consternation of his defence lawyer he replied that he was guilty. This came as a surprise to the judge too. He told Gurd: 'You must stand your trial.' But Gurd replied 'I wish to say I am guilty and I am quite willing to die for what I have done.'

Eventually the judge and defence lawyers persuaded him to plead 'not guilty' and the trial got under way. His defence revolved around the fact he had been depressed and had been drinking all day when the crimes were committed. But, having heard his confession at the beginning of the trial, the jury took only eight minutes to return their guilty verdict. Accordingly, he was sentenced to death for the notorious double murder of Sergeant Enos Molden and Harry Richards.

## A NEW CENTURY, A NEW CHIEF CONSTABLE

With the beginning of the new century, the Force celebrated more than 60 years of service to the community. Yet, in those sixty years Wiltshire Constabulary had still only seen two Chief Constables. It had been a period of immense technological and social change.

Communications were growing apace. Swindon Police Station was soon connected to the new telephone system. A Committee was set up to look at the question of linking other police stations to the system. The cost of setting up telephone communications was more expensive than envisaged and it was agreed to look at 'other' schemes. By 1907, however, telephones had been installed at thirteen police stations. Constables could now report murders, burglaries, housebreaking and arson to the Chief Constable's office at once.

Transport was changing as well. The Force had been formed when walking and horse transport were commonplace. The evolution of the railways had occurred in the intervening period, bringing prosperity to Swindon. The County horse carts were described as 'worn and shaky' – unsatisfactory for a modern police force. Better four-wheel carts were required. These were purchased from H. Willis, of Devizes, at a cost of £32 each.

Because of the influence of the railways Swindon was now becoming a substantial town, with policing problems to match. In 1904 the Superintendent in charge of Swindon was given a pay rise to reflect the extra responsibilities. A decision to increase the number of police in Swindon was postponed until the impact of the newly introduced tramcars was known.

In the rest of Wiltshire, vagrants were a problem. At Fisherton, near Salisbury, there were discussions about the need to put a gaslight outside the police station. It was reported that vagrants were unable to find the station to collect the tickets they needed in order to get into the workhouse for the night.

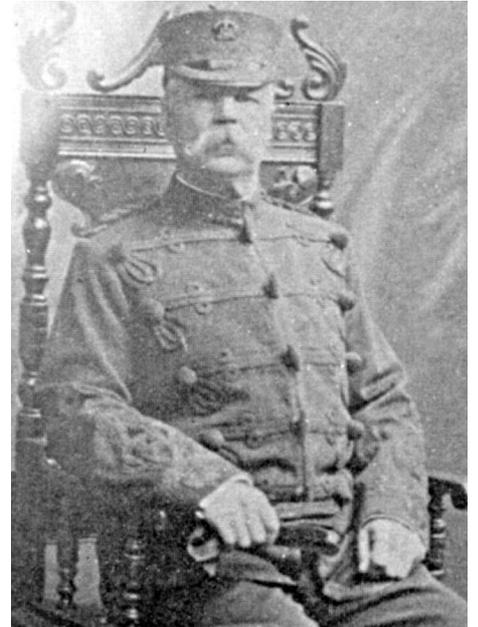
Meanwhile the first motoring offences were being reported. Speeding, for instance, was said to be a problem at Rowde. Around the County, children were throwing stones at passing motorists. Road collisions involving horse-drawn carts had always been a problem; now motorcars were proving a serious hazard to life and limb.

In 1905 the Chief Constable reported 'during the past quarter, proceedings have been taken against the drivers of seven motor cars and one motor cycle, for travelling beyond the speed limit of 20 miles an hour. Of the motorcar drivers, three were fined and four were dismissed, and the charge against the driver of the motorcycle was also dismissed. In some of the cases that were dismissed the Magistrates were of the opinion that the method of taking the speed by watch was defective. I am, therefore, applying for an apparatus for this purpose.' The Chief Constable later purchased a Speed Timing Apparatus for Motor Cars, as used by the East Sussex Constabulary, at a cost of £33. In April 1908 the Chief Constable instructed the Divisions to make returns of all accidents involving death or personal injury.

Captain Robert Sterne gave news of his intention to resign in a letter dated 2nd January 1908. He had been appointed at Salisbury on 5th April 1870 and had served nearly 38 years. Captain Höel Llewellyn replaced Sterne and became the third Chief Constable. He came to Wiltshire Constabulary after a distinguished career in the Army and South African Police. One of his first acts was to inform his men that he would shortly be using his own car, AM 1, to travel around the County.

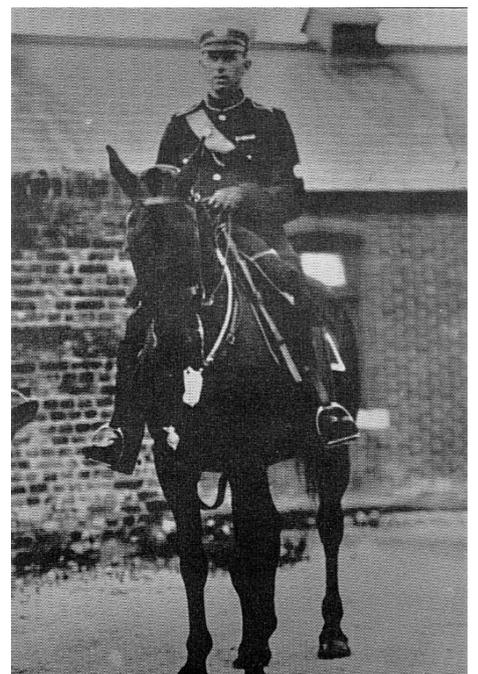
Whistles were issued to the whole of the Force in June 1908, Chief Constable Llewellyn ordering that they should be worn: 'Hook point outwards placed through the top button hole of the tunic, the chain taken down through the second button hole outwards and the whistle carried in the left hand breast pocket. No slack chain is to hang in a loop.'

The problems of policing the visits of Royalty and other dignitaries became apparent in June 1908 when the King and Queen visited Wilton House. One hundred and fifty six men were employed on the operation. Mounted men were told to wear pantaloons, hessian boots, spurs and white gloves.



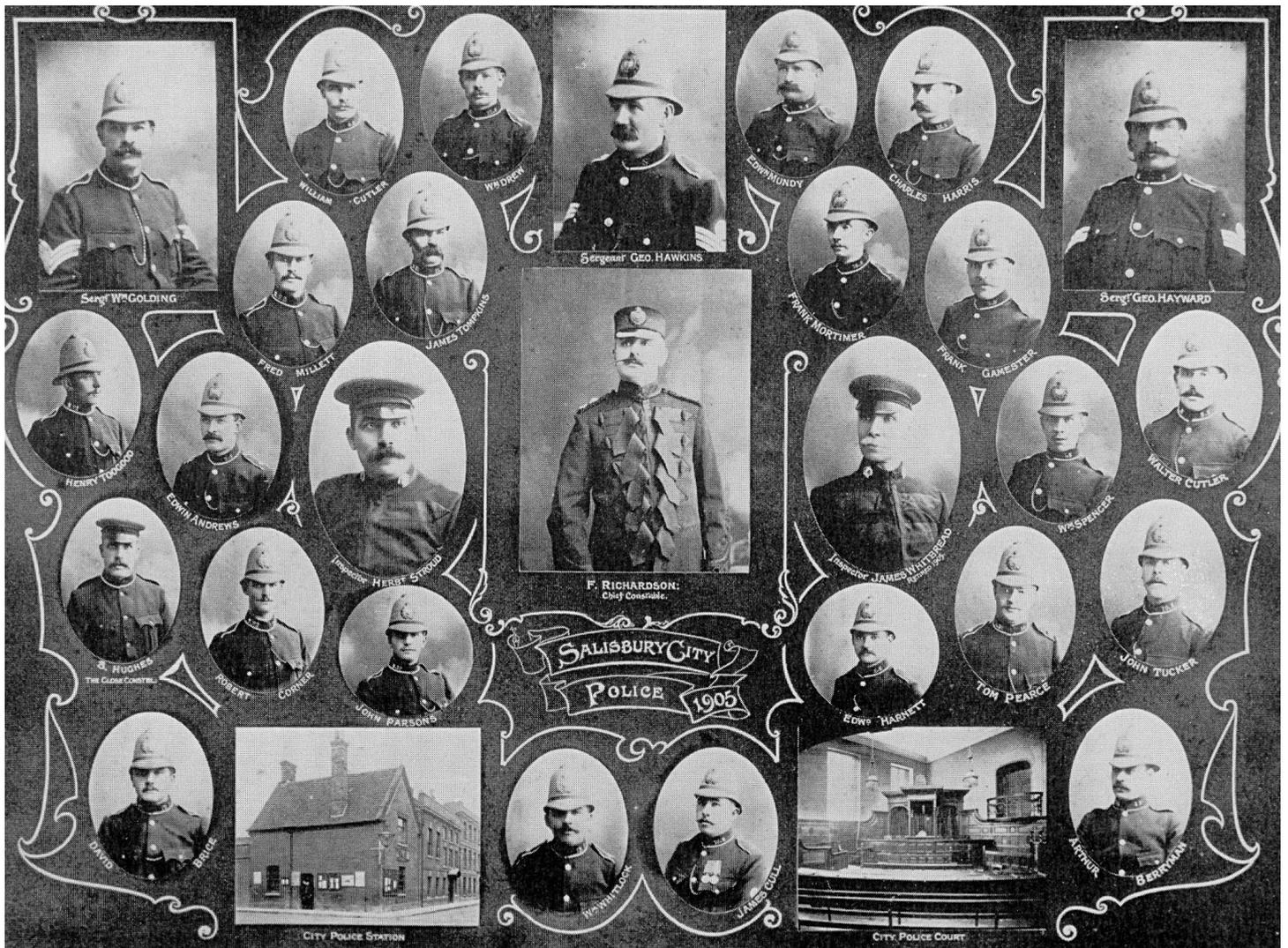
**Superintendent Thomas Tyler, of Trowbridge Division, at the turn of the Century. He joined Wiltshire Constabulary in 1866 and retired in 1907. He was the son of a boatman on the Kennet and Avon Canal.**

*Picture supplied by Anthony Peake, Liden.*



**A mounted member of Salisbury City Police at the turn of the Century.**

*Picture supplied by Peter Daniels, Salisbury.*



**Salisbury City Police, 1905. The men are wearing light summer helmets made of basket weave. Salt Lane Police Station and the City Police Court at The Guildhall are also shown.**

In the hour before the arrival of the Royal Train, all traffic was to be stopped on the route from Salisbury Railway Station to the Park Gates at Wilton and from all of the roads converging on the route. Police Headquarters for the Royal Visit was at the Pembroke Arms Hotel. Royal visits were, and remain, a major undertaking for the Force.

Dogs accompanied constables on duty from October 1908, when police officers were advised to take their dogs out with them on night patrol. The Chief Constable remarked that Irish Terriers were considered better than Airedales, and he obtained permission to keep two or three Bloodhounds for use on police purposes; these were possibly the first operational police dogs maintained by the Watch Committee.

Discipline was imposed rigorously, but perhaps not always to the benefit of the Force. Constables had striven to become amenable to the community, from whom they were reliant for information. But in November 1908 Chief Constable Llewellyn told his men: 'on several occasions I have dropped across members of the Force talking with civilians. This must cease at once and I shall deal severely with any member of the Force who I find not complying with this order.' Police Constable Charles Angell was the first constable to fall foul of the regulation; in January 1909 he was severely reprimanded for talking with civilians.

Crime prevention took another step forward in 1908. Leaflets were printed and circulated to all detached and semi-detached houses warning against 'ladder thieves.' Whether these criminals stole ladders or used ladders to gain access during burglaries is, sadly, unclear.



Looking towards what is the now the Ram Public House, Tidworth, in the 1920s.



Superintendent George Ludlow with his new light police dog cart at Tisbury Police Station in 1910.

*Picture supplied by Mrs Ludlow, Oxenwood.*

March 1909 saw the evolution of formal warrant cards. Until then the police officer's truncheon had acted as his warrant card. Unfortunately many of the new Warrant Cards were lost and, in December the Chief Constable had to remind his men to take greater care with them.

## MARCHING TO THE SOUND OF GUNFIRE



**A police funeral at Upavon. Bystanders have removed their hats as a mark of respect. Many of the officers wear medal ribbons.**

1910 opened with the death of King Edward VII. Black armbands were issued to every member of the Force as the Country went into mourning.

The Suffragettes, campaigning under the banner 'Votes for Women', were the latest public order challenge for the police. There had been a number of incidents and protests around the County and, in December 1910, there was a General Election. Höel Llewellyn warned his men: 'No woman is to be allowed to enter any polling station during the hours of the poll.'

Suffragette protestors were not the only challenge. There was also the question of constables' wives. An officer already had to seek permission before getting married. In addition he had to obtain character references for his bride to be. But the regulations didn't end at the wedding breakfast. In February 1911 Llewellyn wrote: 'Members of the Force are not, when in uniform, to take their wives out for a walk or to walk with any female unless in duty bound to do so. Should a member of the Force find an opportunity to take his wife for a walk he should do so in plain clothes.'

The bicycle allowance was introduced in 1911. This granted rural beat policemen thirty shillings a year, £1.50 in today's money. Men serving in towns received ten shillings, 50p.

Llewellyn brought his experience of the new fingerprint system, which had been developed by the Metropolitan Police, to Wiltshire Constabulary. Documents or articles could now be examined in order to identify people who had recently touched them. In July 1911 the Force was ordered to handle anonymous letters carefully in order to preserve fingerprints.

Later in the year the new police station at Wootton Bassett was opened. The Chief Constable was probably more interested in the implications of the Weekly Rest Day Act. This required all officers to be given fifty-two days leave in a year. At first it was suggested that each man's twelve days annual leave should be counted as part of the fifty-two days. But eventually it was decided that each man be entitled to one day per week off, plus one day per month, subject to duty commitments.

Because of its impact on the number of officers available for patrol, the Act later made it necessary to increase the police establishment. New scales of pay were introduced, which again restored the men's morale, and a further increase in pay was to follow in July 1914.

In May 1913, the Chief Constable decided that caps would be issued to his men. These were similar to the military caps of the time and were to be worn on station work, while cycling and when assembling for pay and drill parades.



**A class photograph taken in the yard at the rear of Swindon Police Station just before the First World War. The caps were introduced in May 1913.**

*Picture supplied by Mrs Bourlet, Devizes.*



This photograph of a police funeral shows a horse-drawn hearse. Men are wearing gaiters – the Sergeant wears a Red Cross badge below his stripes.

A programme of purchasing cottages for police housing was now underway. Where no cottages were available, land was purchased with the intention of building suitable housing accommodation and police stations. Wherever possible, policemen were to live in their district.

Becoming a member of a village community did not include joining the village cricket team. Sports were encouraged within the Force, but playing cricket with 'civilians' was strictly forbidden. Ridiculous as it may seem now, a constable stationed at Ludgershall was severely reprimanded for playing cricket with villagers in July 1919.

War clouds once more gathered over Europe, and in August 1914 the first fourteen policemen were discharged to go and serve in France. A few weeks later Höel Llewellyn applied to rejoin the Army. He was accepted, and throughout the War news of the Chief Constable's exploits, promotions and postings were sent back to the Force. The Deputy Chief Constable, R J Buchanan, took charge of the Force from 14th September.

The War had a marked effect on the County. Salisbury Plain became a vast training ground, with men from all over the Empire converging on the ranges to be turned into soldiers. The following year further police officers were given leave to join the Army – and this pattern continued throughout the War.

By 1916 the drain of men going into the armed services was noticeable in every community. Swindon Watch Committee protested against the numbers of police being mobilised. By 1918 there were ninety-two vacancies in Wiltshire Constabulary out of a total establishment of two hundred and ninety five. Over 30% of the regular officers had either volunteered or had been called up to fight.

The War devastated France and had left Britain economically weakened. Nearly a generation of young men had gone to their graves. The soldiers who returned to the police force were permitted to wear medal ribbons, wound stripes and service chevrons. The names of those officers who died on active service during World War One, are listed on a brass plaque at Police Headquarters, Devizes.

When the Chief Constable, now a Colonel, resumed command on 19th January 1919 one of his first acts was to thank the Force for its conduct during the War.

'Having taken over command of the Force from the Deputy Chief Constable and seen each Divisional Superintendent, I wish to place on the record of the Wiltshire Constabulary my appreciation and admiration of the way all ranks have done their duty in the Great War.'

## **THE GREAT WAR**

### **DIED IN ACTION FROM WILTSHIRE CONSTABULARY**

Cons Walter H. COX  
Wilts Regt BEF

Cons Reginald DORRINGTON  
Wilts Regt BEF

Cons Gerald KING  
Coldstream Guards BEF

Cons Arthur MINCHIN  
Ox & Bucks Light Infantry BEF

Cons Sidney SAINSBURY  
Wilts Regt BEF

Cons Harry O. SMITH  
9th Lancers BEF

Cons Archibald SMITH  
Lancs Fus BEF

Cons Willie TAYLOR  
Scots Guards

### **DIED OF SICKNESS**

Cons Herbert W. CARTER  
Army Vet Corps

Cons Herbert COX  
Grenadier Guards

Cons Edward SMALL  
Military Foot Police

**Mssr. L. Bleriot (centre with moustache) stands next to his new monoplane after displaying it at the British Army Flying Trials on Salisbury Plain in June 1912. Men of Wiltshire Constabulary were assigned to the military exercises to keep order and liaise with the public. Three police officers (Drew, Simms and Zebedee), met Bleriot during the exercise. A 120 hp biplane flown by Mr. Samuel Cody won the trials. His prize was £5,000.**

*Picture supplied by Mrs Potter, Devizes.*



'Although Wiltshire was one of the largest Military Centres, certainly the most troublesome from a police point of view, the County Constabulary gave one man in every three to His Majesty's Navy and Army and the manner in which the remainder, with no assistance from special or reserve constables, so cheerfully and successfully tackled the work regardless of longer hours and increasing difficulties is worthy of the highest praise and commendation.'

Until the Force was up to full strength, Chief Constable Llewellyn decided that only two rest days were to be taken every four weeks. A clear 24 hours was to be given each week, with a constable finishing no later than 11 pm on the night before his day off.

The rules were liberalised to ensure that an officer could take off two consecutive days if he was visiting friends too far away to return in time to go back on duty. In July 1918, as a result of inflation, the bicycle allowance was raised. A boot allowance was also introduced. This amounted to one shilling (5p) a week regardless of rank.

Two days before the Armistice new scales of pay were introduced. Nevertheless, a police strike was brewing over pay and conditions. Prior to 1919 there had been a 'Police Union' in some areas of Britain – principally in London. In 1919 strikes broke out among officers in a number of Forces – chiefly in London, Birmingham and Liverpool. Two thousand men were sacked.

This resulted in a Committee of Inquiry under Lord Desborough and in July 1919 a Police Act came into force, setting up the Police Federation.

The Chief Constable told his men: 'Any member of the Force who fails to report in the ordinary course of duty or when called upon will be forthwith dismissed from the Force.' Such officer or man will under no circumstances be permitted to rejoin the Wiltshire Constabulary and dismissal will result in the loss of all service counting towards pension.'

Elections for the Board of the Police Federation Branch were held on 5th November 1919, and the first meeting of the new Police Federation Branch was held two days later. The first item to be discussed by the Branch was the fact that Wiltshire had not implemented the new scales of pay from 1st April. The first Chairman of the Wiltshire Branch was Inspector John Eels, with Inspector Charles Townsend as Secretary.

While the Police Federation was being set up, new Macintosh capes were being introduced. Another development, in October, was the phasing out of Merit Class stripes owing to the introduction of a new pay scale. Hours were again under review, now that the Force was nearly up to strength. A constable would now work an eight-hour day and would have one day off a week.

The decade ended with a constable being dismissed at Castle Combe for 'carrying on business as a Grocer and Provision Merchant and a retailer of Pigs Offal in High Street, Castle Combe'. Another officer was dismissed for objecting to be vaccinated.

## A MURDER IN THE FAMILY

One of the few murders committed by a police officer against another fellow police officer took place at Coombe, near Netheravon, on April 1st 1913.

The victim of the murder was Sergeant William Crouch, who joined Wiltshire Constabulary in 1900. He was first stationed at Bradford-upon-Avon, moving from there to Swindon, Chilton Foliat and Ludgershall, from where he was posted to Netheravon.

A married man, Crouch lived with his wife and two children at the police station. He was a strict man who nevertheless was reasonable in his attitude towards those serving below him.

Police Constable Ernest Pike had joined the Force in 1895 and was very experienced. He had served at Swindon, Burbage, Bottlesford and Enford. While he was at Bottlesford he was promoted to Sergeant and posted to Swindon. Pike, however, had a quick temper, and at Swindon he ran into difficulties.

Before long he was brought before the Chief Constable, Höel Llewellyn, accused of a serious breach of discipline. He was found guilty, demoted to Second Class Constable and sent to Enford.

Pike settled down well to his new posting. Compared with Swindon, Enford was a pleasant district on the banks of the Salisbury Avon and he got to know the small valley community very well.

He became a popular local policeman and it wasn't long before he won back a stripe – being promoted to Merit Class Constable. But despite his new found happiness, Pike was soon in trouble again. This time it was more serious than before.

He was reported for being in a public house while on duty and for lying to a superior officer. The evidence was submitted to Divisional Headquarters by Sergeant Crouch. On 31st March 1913, Police Constable Pike made the trip to Amesbury Police Station to appear before the Chief Constable.

As the hearing wore on, Pike got quite angry and eventually accused Sergeant Crouch of telling lies. Despite his protestations of innocence, Pike was demoted and told that he would be removed from his new found home in Enford and posted to Colerne on the Somerset border.

Pike was incensed and as he cycled back to Enford with his neighbouring colleague, Police Constable Slade, he talked about the injustice of his predicament and blamed Sergeant Crouch bitterly. As the two officers reached the police house at Enford, Pike dismounted.

Slade, who still had a few miles to go, bade him goodbye. As he cycled away, Pike shouted after him: 'That's it, I've done with the Force. I'll make this County ring.'

That evening, while no-one was looking, Pike smuggled a shotgun out of his cottage. Then he returned to the family home and kissed his wife goodnight. He left the house at about 9pm taking the gun with him. He intended to meet Crouch at their usual meeting place near Coombe around 11pm that night.

As he patrolled his beat Pike dwelt on the day's events. He was first to get to the regular meeting place at the road junction near Coombe. Evidence found later suggests that Pike hid behind a hedge until Crouch arrived. No one knows precisely what happened next – but when the shotgun was discharged Crouch died instantly from a head-wound.

Pike knew that he would certainly hang for the murder. He was in a hopeless position. What could have gone through his troubled mind as he made his way from the scene of the grisly murder? About five hundred yards from the meeting place was a little wooden footbridge across the River Avon. There he placed the gun's muzzle in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

Sergeant Crouch's corpse was found by farm workers at 6am the following morning. Mrs. Pike had already reported her husband missing the night before but no one could find Pike. Slade was called from the station at Upavon. He arrived with the Chief Constable's bloodhounds, Moonlight and Flair, and a search was initiated.

Slade believed Pike was probably the murderer and now on the run. The Force was put on alert. The bloodhounds led Slade up and down the water meadows, confused by the early morning dew. After two hours his body was found in the river – he had fallen off the bridge and floated some way downstream before sinking to the riverbed.

An inquest was opened that morning at Coombe Farm. The hastily convened jury returned a verdict that Police Constable Pike had 'wilfully murdered Sergeant Crouch and afterwards committed suicide.' As a gesture, the Jury donated their Jury fees to the widows of the two policemen.

The funerals were a few days later. Sergeant Crouch was buried with full police honours. His funeral was attended by the Chief Constable, 160 senior officers and other ranks. A band from the Third Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment accompanied the funeral procession.

Police Constable Pike's funeral was held at Enford – with no ceremonial. His wife and children were joined by a number of villagers, who came to mourn the loss of a popular local bobby, who had tragic life had ended in a moment of madness.

## THE ROARING '20S

Matters of etiquette were on the Chief Constable's mind as the 'roaring Twenties' arrived. One of the Chief Constable's first orders of the new decade was to officers who were about to give evidence in court. Slang words were not to be used when in the witness box unless they had been used by the defendant. 'Words such as 'booze', 'swank', 'stunt', 'quids', 'bobs', 'bikes' are most objectionable,' he told them.

Examinations in police and educational subjects were to be held at Police Headquarters for those seeking promotion. Sergeant Mackie, known as 'The Skipper', was appointed in April 1920 to take up the duties of Educational and Training Officer. One of the men to be recruited in 1925, Police Constable (and later Superintendent) Walter Saddler, recalled his experience of training.

Twelve men were selected from seventy applicants and Sergeant Mackie was in charge. He taught arithmetic, geography, dictation, law and police subjects. The men were accommodated in the barrack block on the South side of the courtyard at Police Headquarters, Bath Road, Devizes.

'Our day comprised of early morning fatigues and inspection of the Mess room and sleeping quarters. Classroom was from 9am until 11 am and from 11.30 until 12.30pm. Physical jerks were supervised by Sergeant Bob Betteridge, later to become an Inspector. He told us how to perform but rarely did so himself. From 1.30pm to 2.30pm, square bashing (drill) with Sergeant Thomas Howell, who also became an Inspector. His favourite reprimand was 'You was wrong, wasn't you'. This was followed by more tuition from 'The Skipper'. Tea was at 5pm.'

Half the squad was allowed out for three hours every night, while the other half completed their homework. On Sundays there was Church Parade and weekend leave was allowed every five or six weeks.

Constable Jefferies and his wife cleaned and cooked for Sergeant Mackie and the recruits. Permission was needed to go to the cinema, and a written application to Sergeant Mackie was required if the men wanted to go to the miniature music hall in Sidmouth Street. Needless to say, public houses were out of bounds.



**The Judge's Procession in the Market Place, Devizes, as it progresses towards the opening of the Assizes. Mounted police were detailed to escort the Judge, who resided at Northgate House during the Assizes. Young boys running with the procession are wearing Edwardian clothes.**

**The citizens of Melksham crowd round to examine their new fire engine during the 1920s. Nearby is the old, hand powered pump, which was probably used by PC George Phillips in the fire described elsewhere in this book.**

'We were not permitted to associate with females, unless they were classified as one's approved fiancée. Any visits to Devizes by an alleged 'fiancée' had to be reported to Constable Jefferies,' recalled Mr. Saddler.

Decades before, the new railways had brought travelling criminals into Wiltshire from the industrial areas. November 1921 saw the appearance of the motorised criminal! 'The use of motor vehicles by the criminal class is increasing – especially for burglaries and housebreaking,' warned Chief Constable Llewellyn.



**Wiltshiremen and officers of other Forces stand alongside a coalmine during the 1921 Miner's Strike.**

*Picture supplied by Mrs Bowyer, Longridge.*

In 1921, coal miners went on strike in South Wales. More than a hundred Wiltshire officers were sent to the coalfields at the request of the Chief Constable of Glamorganshire. The Wiltshiremen got on well with the communities they policed and they received a number of mementoes. Later, during the 1926 General Strike, Wiltshire officers were sent to Derbyshire to control picketing and patrol the pit communities.

With more motorised traffic on the road, instruction pamphlets were issued illustrating correct traffic signals. Constables also received instructions about point duty. In September 1922, for instance, they were told: 'A police officer must not wait until an approaching vehicle is close to him before he gives the signal to proceed.'

'A very common fault amongst police officers on traffic control is to signal to a driver while looking in another direction – this means chaos, uncertainty and often objectionable remarks from the passing drivers.'

The recording of crime details were also modernised. Robbery books were discontinued and, instead, all crimes were to be entered in a crime register – whether solved or undetected. A written report of each crime had to be sent to the County Headquarters for the attention of the Chief Constable.



**Police Constable Albert Hill stops for a chat with Miss Edith Bray at Firs Down in 1927. Miss Bray's Henley motorcycle was considerably faster than Albert Hill's bicycle, for which he was paid a monthly allowance. The police first used bicycles in the 1890s.**

*Picture supplied by Alderbury Police Station.*

One of the first crimes to be recorded in the register was the Trowbridge Christmas Eve murder. In the early evening of December 24th, 1925, brewer's traveller Teddy Richards was robbed and shot dead outside his home.

Wiltshire Constabulary was quickly on the scene. Within twenty-four hours, Superintendent Alf Underwood, of Trowbridge Division, arrested two young Bombardiers. The men, one of whom was John Lincoln, both served in the Royal Horse Artillery at Trowbridge Barracks.

The case aroused the interest of the national press because Lincoln was the son of a former Member of Parliament. The trial, at Devizes, opened with Lincoln pleading guilty and his accomplice not guilty. In Lincoln's evidence he told the jury that he had shot Richards.

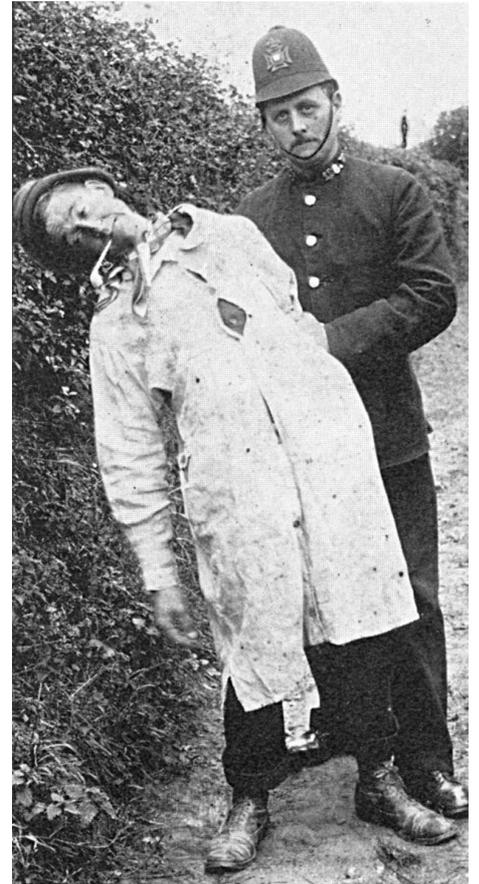
In summing up, the judge pointed out that only one of the men could have fired the shot. But he added that if the other knew his companion was armed, then he was guilty too. After Lincoln was sentenced to death and taken down to the cells, his colleague was released – only to be re-arrested on a charge of armed robbery by the Deputy Chief Constable W.T. Brooks. Later the man was tried at Salisbury and found guilty. He was sentenced to fourteen years imprisonment. Lincoln was hanged at Shepton Mallett.

The War had placed an enormous strain upon the national economy, now an economic depression was on the way. This was reflected in a tightening of belts in 1922. Allowances were reduced and pay was reduced – by two and a half percent!

Leather leggings were issued as part of the uniform but they were deeply unpopular with the officers. Apart from being uncomfortable, the bottoms of the leggings rubbed the bootlaces through. Some men cut the tongues off old boots to protect their bootlaces.

The Chief Constable wasn't concerned at all with the discomfort of wearing leggings. 'During wet weather leggings must be worn, for nothing looks worse than a police officer stepping about in the mud with his trousers turned up,' he told his men.

There were certainly no turned up trousers in Devizes in 1926, when the Force marched solemnly to Potterne to bury their second Chief Constable – Captain Robert Sterne.



**Police Constable George Hunt, of Tisbury, demonstrates the arrest of a 'drunk' in the 1920s.**

*Picture supplied by Mrs Ludlow, Bath.*

## CALM BEFORE THE STORM

The 1930s dawned hopeful that the years of depression were at an end. Many of the district police stations were now linked by telephone. Despite the burgeoning motor industry, most policemen still spent their duty walking the beat or riding around the district on their bicycles.

When they were not actually on duty, they could usually be found in their gardens. Wives still acted as unpaid assistants by taking messages, looking after women prisoners and cooking, if the need arose, for temporary inmates.

Crime reports from Divisional Headquarters were taken down in long hand over the telephone. Policemen were usually the first to be called to the scene of a collision. They were encouraged to study first aid and if they passed the St. John Ambulance examinations, wore a distinctive silver badge on their tunic sleeve.

Policemen were also usually first at the scene of a fire. In October 1935 Police Constable Ernie Axford was posted from Swindon to Neston. He recalled later 'I was walking round the village about 10pm one evening when I noticed several men around the door of a cottage and on enquiring what was going on I was told that there had been a chimney fire and that the local brigade had been called.'

'I entered the cottage but could see no fire and very little mess. On going outside I heard the sound of a bell in the distance and after a while there appeared a De Dion touring car, 1923 model, driven by a local baker.

'This was followed with much clanging of the bell of the local fire engine. This was made up of a Daimler open lorry, 1915 vintage, which had seen service in France during the First World War. It carried a Merryweather pump driven by a Lister stationary engine. As it was not equipped with lights it had to follow the De Dion car. There were about six firemen on board all in uniform with brass helmets except the Chief who wore a silver one.'

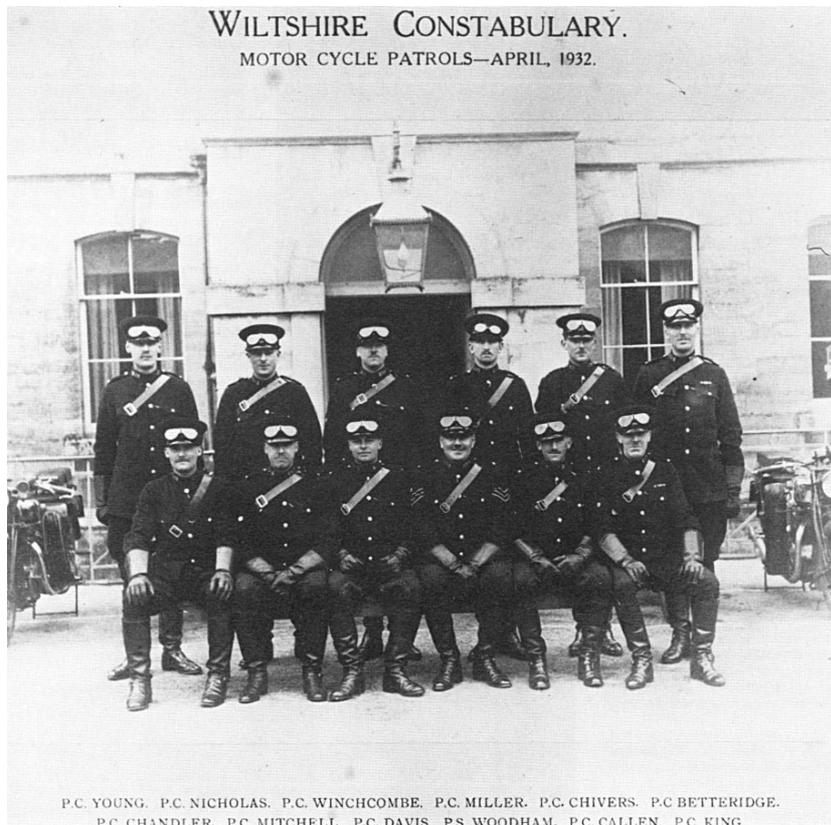
The Chief was told that the fire was out – but he wanted to make sure. A gooseberry bush was uprooted and a rope attached. At the other end of the rope a flat iron was tied. A fireman then climbed up the roof and the flat iron was thrown down the chimney so that the gooseberry bush could be pulled down behind it. 'There was a mighty shout of 'All right below' and down came the flat iron with a tremendous crash – right into the fireplace of the house next door!'

If they lived in a remote police district, domestic life could be difficult for a police officer and his family. PC John Pearce recalls his move to Stourhead:

'We moved to the district in January 1937 and the police station then was at Zeals on the main A303 road. We arrived in a heavy snowstorm and a kindly neighbour had lighted a fire in the sitting room. Much to my horror there was no water laid on to the cottage – there was a well two gardens away, no sink in the kitchen, no electricity supply and the old fashioned range in the kitchen was completely burnt out. My first job was to dash into Mere and buy an oil cooker and some Aladdin lamps.'



Police Constable Newman takes details at the scene of a road collision near Amesbury in 1935.



**Motor Cycle Patrols, 1932.**

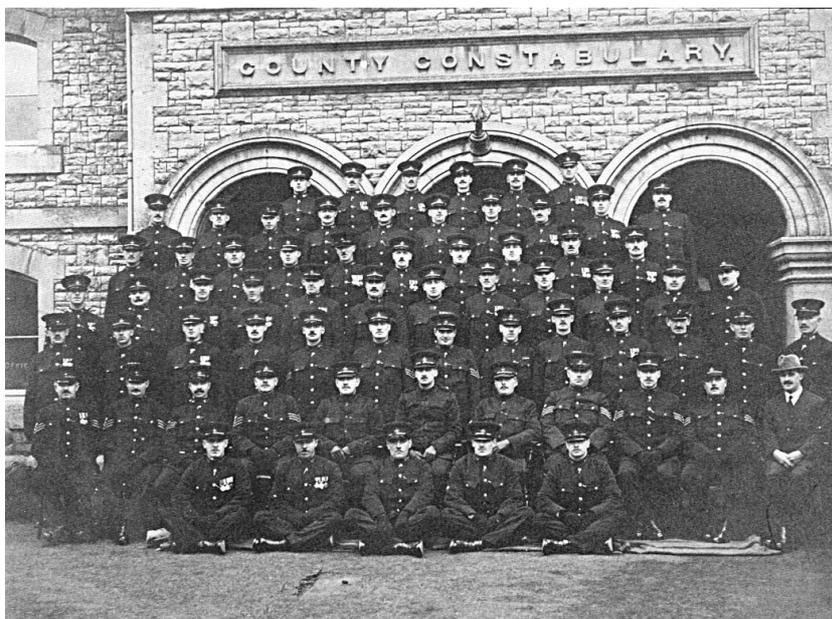
In 1939 PC Pearce was moved into a new police station at Stourton. Even here there was no electric light and a bucket served for a lavatory.

Soon the Luftwaffe's bombers would be cutting through the night air above Stourton – on their way to blitz Bristol and Bath.

Wiltshire was ready for them. Chief Constable Llewellyn had a Deputy Chief Constable, six superintendents, sixteen inspectors, forty-six sergeants and two hundred and eighty one constables – all linked by telephone and waiting expectantly for the invasion.

Sand bags were thrown up outside Devizes Police Headquarters. Concrete tank barriers blocked bridges from the advance of the Panzers. Blockhouses were built and obstacles were laid in fields that might become German landing grounds.

Large parts of Savernake Forest became a bomb dump and airfields sprouted up around the County. Oil installations were guarded and national treasures were sent to the tunnels under Chilmark.



**Swindon Division in the 1930s. Only one detective, Detective Sergeant Mitchell (in plain clothes) is pictured.**

## A CONSTABULARY AT WAR

**PC Arthur Vincent, of Great Bedwyn, with his Divisional Superintendent, in a crater caused by a German bomb. A wartime bomber had jettisoned its bombs after failing to locate the canal and railway bridges at Great Bedwyn.**

*Picture supplied by Mr. Vincent, Chippenham.*



The War brought new problems and responsibilities for the Wiltshire Constabulary. The shortage of officers was overcome by relying more on the special constabulary and various grades of police auxiliary.

To the concern of Chief Constable Llewellyn, the Government established a Women's Auxiliary Police Corps to help with clerical and administrative tasks. The Corps was often composed of the wives and daughters of serving officers, while the Police War Reserve consisted mainly of retired men recalled for duty.

By 1944 the total whole time strength of the Force was 522 – 123 in excess of the authorised fixed strength. Elsie Atwell, the daughter of Police Constable Oliver Atwell, joined the Women's Auxiliary Police Corps on 27th November 1941. She wrote:

'I was living in Swindon, and Mr W.T. Brooks, who was then the Deputy Chief Constable and in charge of the Swindon Division asked me if I would like to work on the switchboard at Divisional Headquarters. He contacted many police officers' wives, supposing that they would have some idea of the discipline.'

The new women police auxiliaries were not very popular with their male colleagues, who thought they would 'take the bread from their mouths.' At first Swindon had about eight or nine police auxiliaries. Three were put onto switchboard duty, three were sent to the Gorse Hill station, one was kept in reserve as a driver and another was posted to the General Office.

Women auxiliaries also took on the task as acting as matrons to the female prisoners – something previously undertaken by police officers' wives. The auxiliaries worked an eight-hour shift system. They were on duty six days a week and were given just twelve days leave a year. Pay was £3 per week, plus a shilling (5p) per week boot allowance.

Thousands of young men were stationed in the County during the War and this led to particular problems in places like Swindon. Fights were a regular feature of life in the town as disagreements broke out between the men of different regiments and nationalities. Drunkenness and disorderly conduct were rife.

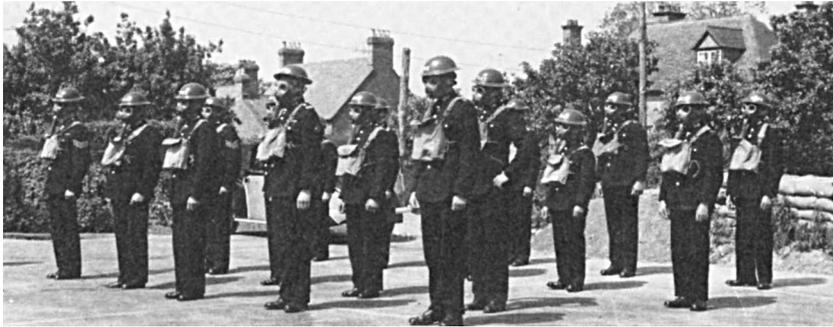
There were a number of police raids on brothels during the War. If caught, prostitutes aged seventeen and over were put into the cells. On one occasion four prostitutes were imprisoned at Swindon overnight. This stood as a record for many years. Younger girls were put into the custody of the telephone operator!

During the War every community was subjected to a strictly-enforced blackout. These elaborate precautions did not deter German bombers. They successfully bombed several towns in the County – as well as some important military installations. The railway tunnel and gasometer at Salisbury were attacked and bombs fell on Bulford and Larkhill. Bertram Sample, who lived at Limpley Stoke, recalls looking down into the cockpits of Luftwaffe bombers as they flew down the valley towards Bath. Incendiary bombs were dropped on the downs near Shalbourne and, on another occasion, an aircraft was sent to bomb the railway and canal bridge at Great Bedwyn, but thankfully missed.

**Devises special constabulary on the outbreak of the War. Extra police were recruited to the special constabulary and Police War Reserve as more regular officers enlisted.**

*Picture supplied by Mrs Sheppard, Salisbury.*





police War Reservists practice Respirator Drill at Division Headquarters, Marlborough, 17th June 1940.

Picture supplied by Wiltshire County Archives.

The national emergency meant that Wiltshire Constabulary not only had to deal with bombs falling in the County. They could be called to other areas as well.

W.J. Pearce recalls that 'various police stations were earmarked so that the police officer occupying it were at standby as part of a squad to go wherever the need arose. One Sunday afternoon, about 2pm, I was happily reading the News of the World when the telephone rang from Divisional Headquarters at Warminster. At the time I was stationed at Stourton. I was required in Warminster Divisional Headquarters with all of my paraphernalia to join the squad to go to Southampton – which had been heavily blitzed the night before.'

At Warminster the police boarded a coach for the journey to Southampton. Inspector Nicholas was in command with Sergeant Gray, from Honingsham, his deputy. The police arrived in Southampton at 5 pm. In many places the City was still burning. White tape marked off areas where unexploded bombs were waiting to be defused. The men were billeted at the Pentagon Hotel, which was full of visitors and refugees. That night the bombing resumed. The Luftwaffe were guided from France by the fires still burning in the City.

'The previous evening the Civic Centre had been blown to bits together with the local Police Headquarters and the Pentagon had become the centre for all ARP work. The Germans were determined to wipe out the port as one of the preludes to invasion, and all the citizens had gone to the New Forest to escape.'

That night the men, using stirrup pumps and buckets of sand, spent their time putting out the incendiary bombs which the Germans had dropped. 'About 2 am the all clear went. From my experience at Stourton, where there was a large aerodrome, and at Mere, where there was a large Army camp, I believed that Jerry would not let a building like the Pentagon go undamaged.'

'I was quite right. A little later I could hear the engines of a bomber labouring under a heavy load and I called out 'This is for us!' but there was nothing we could do. We waited and then I heard the whine of a big bomb that shook the building – but it did not explode.'

The men were paraded the following day. Among other things, they were instructed to stop the looting of goods from bombed shops and premises. They were also shown the 1000kg bomb that had missed the Pentagon the night before. It had hit the Odeon cinema – but failed to explode. After nearly a week at Southampton, the men were permitted to return to Wiltshire.

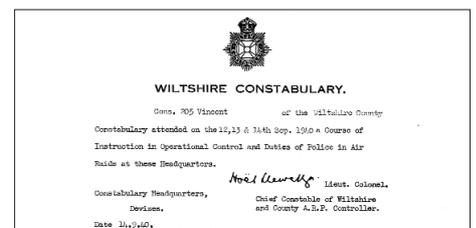
The threat from aircraft was ever present and not just from the enemy. With thousands of aircraft stationed around the South, many of them flying without lights, accidents were bound to happen. Police were usually the first to know.

PC Vincent, stationed at East Grafton, remembers attending the site of a crashed Canadian bomber on the road between Burbage and Collingbourne Kingston. All six members of the crew died. A Typhoon crashed at Collingbourne All these incidents were recorded and details sent to Police Headquarters.

An important element of police training during the War was the action to be taken against gas or bombing attacks. At the beginning of the War, officers had to report once a week to their Divisional Headquarters to be taught about Air Raid Precautions. This included lectures and tests about various types of gas, how it could be detected, what precautions could be taken and how to treat the victims. Likewise they were taught about the different types of bombs and aircraft, and what to do in the event of invasion. Cigarette smokers amongst them were able to supplement their training with information on air raid precautions contained in numerous sets of cigarette cards.



Police constables were usually the first at the scene of a collision. They were encouraged to study 'First Aid' to a high standard. If successful in the exam, they were awarded a certificate and two round metal St John Ambulance badges. These were worn on each sleeve of the uniform. Supplied by Mr. Arthur Vincent, Chippenham.



In 1940 at the height of the Battle of Britain, Police Constable Vincent attended a course on Air Raid Protection (ARP). The course included a study of the effects of bombs and gas – as well as aircraft recognition. Sporadic bombing of the County was punctuated by dogfights and air crashes.

Supplied by Mr. Arthur Vincent, Chippenham.

## **THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

### **DIED IN ACTION**

**Cons John E. McDOUGALL**

Cpl Royal Armoured Corps

**J/Clerk Phillip F. OPPERMAN**

Pilot Officer RAF

**J/Clerk Richard J. CLEMPSON**

Guardsman Coldstream Guards

**T/ D. Sgt Ronald N. FEWTRELL**

Flying Officer RAF

**S/ Cons Alfred E. HAYES**

Flt Sgt RAF

**Cons Jack A. PERKINS**

Pilot Officer RAF

**Cons James R. WALDRON**

Pilot Officer RAF

**Cons Robert STEVENS**

W.O. RAF

**Cons Francis T. HOPPS DFC**

A/Flt Lieut. RAF

**Cons George H. LANNING**

Pte Dorset Regt

**T/ D. Sgt Herbert JOHNSON**

Lieut. Commando. Regt (Died)

**Cons Edward L. C. HOWELL**

Flt Sgt RAF

**Cons Jack HARNESS**

Gunner Royal Artillery (Died)

**Cons Frederick C. W. CLEMENT**

Flt Lieut. RAF

**Henry N. CATT**

A/Flying Officer RAF

**Cons Alfred ASTLE DFC**

Pilot Officer RAF

**J/Clerk Leonard J. BULL**

Sgt RAF

**Cons Archie G. KNOWLER**

A.C.2 RAF

**Sgt John RAY**

Flying Officer RAF

**Cons George A. SANDY**

Sgt RAF

**Cons William L. WALTON**

Lieut. Nigeria Regt

**Cons Frederick L. J. PONTING**

Pilot Officer RAF

**T/ Insp. Reginald H. M. CURTIS**

Captain Civil Affairs (Died)

**J/Clerk Kenneth P. SARTIN**

Flt Sgt RAF

**Cons William F. V. FORDE**

Flying Officer RAF

On most beats men had to visit 'Vulnerable Points' nightly – sometimes more regularly. In Wiltshire, as other places, 'Vulnerable Points' included railway bridges and electrical, oil or industrial installations.

Chief Constable Höel Llewellyn worked continuously at Police Headquarters. He was too old to enlist, but nevertheless ran Police Headquarters with military precision. He was the County's Civil Defence Controller and was responsible for one of the busiest counties in the Country. Records suggest that from the outbreak of the War onwards, Höel Llewellyn didn't take a single day's holiday. He announced his intention to retire, as Britain's most senior Chief Constable, in 1943. His efforts were rewarded with a Knighthood but, sadly, the strain of running the Force during wartime had taken its toll. Llewellyn died suddenly only months before he was due to leave the Force. An Acting Chief Constable, Mr. W.T. Brooks, was appointed in the interim period. He served until 1946.

The impact of the Second World War on the Force was profound in many other ways. Men began to be called up right from the start of the War. The first recorded in General Orders is Constable Reginald F. Cuss, No. 287, who as a Reservist was recalled to the Army in September 1939. He returned to the Force in April 1941 and was stationed at Box. was called up again in September 1942 and he did not return to the Wiltshire Constabulary until July 1946.

During the course of the War, 25 members of the Wiltshire Constabulary lost their lives whilst on military service. Their names are recorded on the Headquarters War Memorial. From the first group of seven released for flying duties with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, five appear on the memorial.

The police officers who remained in Wiltshire during the Second World War had many added responsibilities. They not only had to cope with their 'routine' duties, but also with policing the influx of servicemen determined to enjoy themselves whilst they could.

In October 1939 a War Reserve Constable was commended "for good work in connection with a case under the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928 in which the defendant was fined £21 and an order made for the confiscation of 1,644 gallons of petrol".

In November 1943 another officer was commended "for good work in connection with a case of murder and rape for which a member of the American Army was sentenced to death by General Court Martial."

A War Reserve Constable and a special constable were commended in March 1944 "for the most efficient manner in which they handled the situation when a heavy bomber laden with sea mines, crash landed."

Finally, in September 1944, an officer was commended "in connection with the investigation into a mêlée... arising out of which one American soldier was fatally stabbed and several British airborne soldiers were injured".

In 1946 the new Chief Constable was appointed. From a shortlist of twelve, another ex Army officer, Lieutenant Colonel Harold Golden, was selected.

One of his first duties was to oversee the inauguration of the 999 emergency telephone system. This enabled members of the public to telephone for help immediately if circumstances required the attendance of the emergency services.



**VE Day Parade at Blue Boar Row, Salisbury, on Sunday 13th May 1945. The Women's Auxiliary Police Corps consisted of (back row, left to right): Margaret Hillier, Kathleen Ashley, Eileen White and Iris Horton. In the front row are Gladys Fancy, Marjorie Joint, Margaret Goater and Winifred Rendell. It was a sunny afternoon and none of the women had received drill instruction before. They were given half an hour's training in the corridor at the police station.**

*Picture supplied by Mrs Drew, Totton.*

## THE FORCE CONSOLIDATES

The 1950s were a period of development and consolidation. Wiltshire had six Divisions. They were: A Division at Salisbury; B Division at Trowbridge; C Division at Chippenham; D Division at Swindon; E Division at Marlborough and HQ Division at Devizes.

There was still no District Training Centre in the South West and most police constables undertook their initial training at either Mill Meece, in the Midlands, or Sandgate – near Folkestone.

Duty was punctuated by short periods of leisure. Chief Constable Harold Golden was a keen sportsman and he encouraged all of his officers to play an active part in inter-force competitions. Many Wiltshire Constabulary sports trophies are still in evidence around the County, together with numerous team photographs at athletics meetings, cricket tournaments, football fixtures or rugby matches.

The men of the Marlborough Division had the regular pleasure of policing the Ascot Race Meetings. Former Police Constable Fred Cutting recalled: 'I went twice, in 1952 and 1953. I still remember with great joy when 'Choir Boy' won the Hunt Cup in 1953. Two happy PCs, Stan Opie and yours truly, went to London to see the Coronation Lights at the horse's expense.'

Unlike his predecessor, the new Chief Constable did not run Wiltshire Constabulary on such strict military lines. Although he had served in the Army for nineteen years and fought in the First World War, Golden had also had an eleven-year career as Chief Constable of Shropshire.

One of his first moves was to help restore the morale of the Force and improve personnel management. He started a series of annual interviews with men recruited after 1946. Fred Cutting recalls: 'Occasionally something useful did come out of them. I remember asking for a driving course and was told that when I had passed my Police Promotion Examination I would get my course. I was fortunate to pass in January 1956. In April I had my interview and in May I had my five week initial driving course.'

Despite the modernisation in personnel management, the private life of a Wiltshire police constable could still be fairly restrictive. On joining, men were still told that they would not be expected to marry until the end of their probation. If they decided to get married, they could not expect a home. Officers were still not allowed to spend the night out of the district unless it was on a day off.

Police houses themselves were still primitive. One former police constable admitted: 'Many of our houses had bucket loos, quite good for some things but a bind to empty. Some houses had no tap water, many had no baths fitted. After my early years at Marlborough and being in rented accommodation I was allocated a police house at Bishops Cannings. Quite a good house except it had no toilet, no tap water and no bath. We had an old boiler in the outhouse, which supplied hot water when stoked with old Police Gazettes. When my wife had a bath I had to stand guard on the back garden path.'



**The entrance to the old Wiltshire Constabulary Headquarters at Bath Road, Devizes. Formerly the Wiltshire Militia Stores, it was built in the 1850s. Wiltshire Constabulary took possession in 1879. The building was demolished to make way for the High Lawns Estate. Here it is decorated to celebrate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth 2nd in 1953.**



**Police Constable Tom Bradley with a new Rover 75 patrol car near Salisbury in 1952. The Rover 75 was introduced after it was found that the smaller Rover 12 could not carry the heavy VHF radio and batteries.**

*Picture supplied by Mrs Bradley, Salisbury.*

## POLICING THE SWINGING 60S

The Police Act 1964 saw the old Watch Committees and Standing Joint Committees replaced by modern Police Authorities made up of Councillors and Magistrates. They were charged with the task of maintaining 'an adequate and efficient Force', which was to be properly housed and equipped.

Police Authorities were also given the task of appointing and, where necessary, dismissing the Chief Constable. Police Authority members were Magistrates, who had wide experience of the local criminal justice system, and directly elected Councillors who knew their communities and could themselves be 'dismissed' by the people of Wiltshire at election time. In times of trouble, the Authority could also call on the substantial financial reserves of the County Council and the skills of a much larger organisation.

In Wiltshire the Chief Constable, Harold Golden, was coming to the end of a distinguished career, both as a soldier and police officer. He was awarded the Police Long Service and Good Conduct Medal in 1958 and the CBE in 1960. Golden retired in 1963 and continued to live in Wiltshire for a number of years, until moving back to Norfolk, where he died in April 1976.

Golden's successor at Police Headquarters was George Robert Glendinning, who became Chief Constable on the 4th October 1963. Glendinning had been educated at Cambridge University and had a Master of Arts degree in modern languages. Although he had served with the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve during the War, he had been a professional police officer most of his life.

His first appointment as a Chief Constable had been in the vastly different landscape of Perthshire and Kinross. There he had been responsible for a major programme of modernisation and then expansion – including the building of a new modern headquarters building.

The 1960s were to be a period of unprecedented industrial and economic growth – a time for consolidation and then expansion. Glendinning proved he was up to the job. One of the top priorities was the replacement of the Bath Road Police Headquarters.

The buildings had originally been constructed in the 1850s for use as the 'Wilts Militia Stores'. A directory states that the plans were drawn by: 'Mr. Thomas Henry Wyatt, of 77 Great Russell Street, London. Vice President of the Royal Institution of British Architects'. The chosen site was a field between Bath Road Turnpike and the New Prison.

The building was completed around 1859 or 1860 and building costs were estimated at £7,000. The Force took possession of the buildings from the Militia in 1879, where the Constabulary Headquarters were to remain for another 85 years. A row of brick cottages, later used as accommodation for senior officers and their families, was completed between 1862 and 1865.

The new Police Headquarters were commissioned in the early 1960s and opened in 1964 on a spacious site at London Road, Devizes, where they remain at the time of writing. The advantage of the new site was its size and accessibility. There was plenty of room for expansion – and large playing fields for sporting activities.

Devizes wasn't the only place that needed new office accommodation. As one of the 'London over-spill towns', Swindon continued to grow rapidly during the 1960s. The Old Town Police Station at the top of Eastcott Hill was nearing the end of its 100-year working life and, by the mid 1960s it was clear that 'D Division' (Swindon) needed a much larger, modern station. Planning began for new accommodation and, in 1973, the Old Town Station was eventually demolished. That year the Division was moved to the then modern purpose built building in the centre of Swindon.

## THE 1970S AND ‘OPERATION JULIE’

The 1970s started with the extension of the new Police Headquarters at London Road, Devizes. Plans were also underway for the introduction of a Police National Computer (PNC) at Hendon in North London. It was the beginning of a period of technological change which was to have profound effects on the management and effectiveness of the modern police force. PNC terminals were to be installed in every police force.

The PNC gave Wiltshire Constabulary fast access to centrally held records, including information on stolen or suspect vehicles and wanted or missing people. It was to be a vital tool in the massive drugs hunt, codenamed Operation Julie, in which Wiltshire Constabulary was to play a leading role.

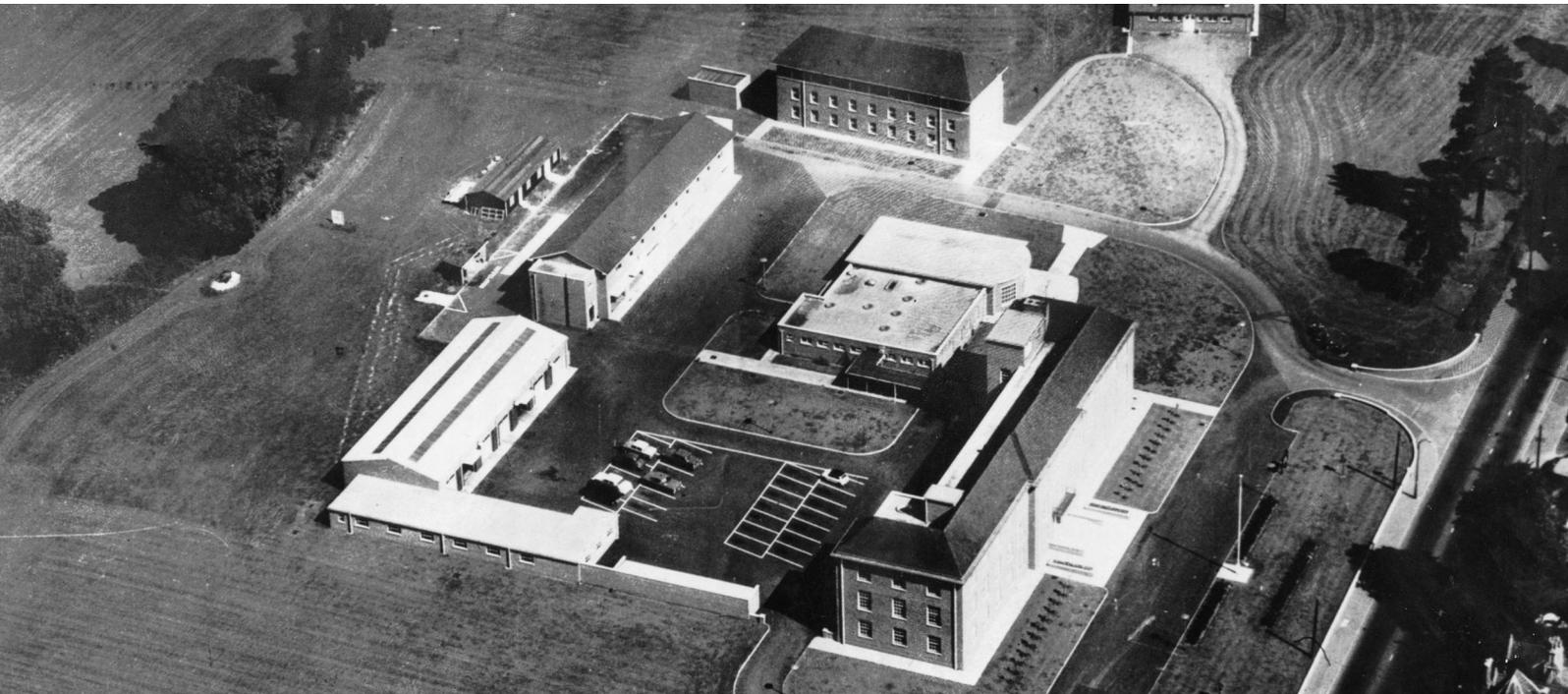
The most dramatic operational effect on the Force came with the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975. At last female police officers were allocated to 24-hour operational shifts. It is difficult now to understand the significance of the move. The dominant culture of the Constabulary during its earlier years was militaristic and predominantly male. The absence of women and the reluctance of several Chief Constables to employing women, were taken for granted. The new Act had a profound effect and paved the way for Wiltshire Constabulary's appointment of a female Chief Constable, Elizabeth Neville (now Dame Elizabeth Neville), in April 1997 which would have been unthinkable for Samuel Meredith or Robert Sterne.

In the media there was now growing concern about the continued rise in crime, illegal drugs and road collisions. This, combined with real problems of recruitment and retention of the existing Force, provided Wiltshire Constabulary with severe difficulties.

Levels of police pay were once again a cause for concern. By the early 1970s many police officers were earning considerably less than skilled workers. The Government established a committee, under the Chairmanship of Lord Edmund-Davies, to look into levels of police pay. It recommended increases of more than 40% for senior officers and set a new starting salary of over £4,000 for probationers – ten times the annual wage of the first Chief Constable of Wiltshire.

There was a slight improvement in recruitment in 1975, but unfortunately this was not sustained in the following year and in 1976, fifty officers left the Force without having served long enough to qualify for pension or gratuity! By contrast only 54 new recruits joined the Force – making a net increase of only four in that year.

**Photograph of Police Headquarters, London Road, Devizes taken in the 1960s showing the layout of the complex.**



The personnel problem deteriorated even further in 1977. Eighty-nine officers left the Force, with only eighty-two joining. This, combined with constraints on the recruitment of auxiliaries and the rising crime rate, made life extremely difficult for the Chief Constable.

Public demonstrations and the growth of a 'free' Summer Solstice pop festival at Stonehenge caused major problems of policing and public order. The policing costs grew at each successive festival throughout the 1970s and 1980s – as officers from other Constabularies were called in to protect landowners against trespass and a myriad of other crimes.

The 1970s ended with the retirement of George Glendinning as Chief Constable of Wiltshire and the appointment of his successor, Kenneth Mayer.

## POLICING STONEHENGE



This picture is known in Wiltshire Constabulary as the 'Thin Blue Line'. A not very peaceable looking 'Peace Convoy' approaches Stonehenge. In the mid 1980s the problem public order at the annual Summer Solstice became a national issue. It was only resolved as a result of the willingness of English Heritage, the police and the various travellers and religious groups to resolve their differences during negotiations.

*Picture supplied by Trevor Porter, Trowbridge.*

Public order problems at Stonehenge were not an invention of the liberal 1960s and 1970s. There are records of public disorder at the site since at least 1914, and probably before that.

Early in 1901, Stonehenge had been enclosed and an entry fee of a shilling per head charged. In 1906 the astronomer Sir Norman Lockyer had published a book on Stonehenge. The book may have encouraged wider interest in the annual Summer Solstice event and, in 1908, over two thousand attended the early morning event. The following year a modern Druid sect began to attend.

The Chief Druid, who officiated at the Summer Solstice gatherings, was Dr. G.W. MacGregor Reid. In 1914 the Summer Solstice was on a Sunday morning, and the attendance was much larger than usual. The day was marked by disorder for the first time in living memory.

The fracas began with an attempt by the Druids to carry out their ceremony within the stone circle. Dr MacGregor Reid, Mr George Catchlove and eight others paid admission to the enclosure – although they protested against the charge.

At about twenty past three in the morning Dr MacGregor Reid began to read Druidical prayers at the 'altar stone'. He had not got very far before Superintendent Buchanan of Wiltshire Constabulary stepped in. Buchanan drew attention to a notice which prohibited any form of meeting or service within the circle. He told Dr MacGregor Reid that he should stop the ceremony immediately, but the request was ignored and the Druid leader continued in an even louder voice.

Superintendent Buchanan warned a second time that if MacGregor Reid didn't stop immediately the police would be forced to throw him out of the enclosure. The Druids ignored the second warning and, in consequence, MacGregor Reid was forcibly ejected. His followers left of their own accord. Later in the day MacGregor Reid and Catchlove, who were wearing white robes and purple cassocks, held services outside the enclosure.

In 1915 the Druids were again refused free admission to the enclosure. For a second time MacGregor Reid and his supporters were ejected from the circle – for the same reason. The Druids have continued to hold their ceremonies at Stonehenge during the Summer Solstice ever since.

## THE MURDER OF PC KELLAM



**Police Constable Desmond Kellam, who was murdered in Trowbridge in October 1979 while investigating a burglary in Church Walk.**

*Picture supplied by Wiltshire Constabulary.*

In 1979 Police Constable Desmond Kellam became the third serving member of the Wiltshire Constabulary to be murdered while on duty. He was killed while attending the scene of an attempted burglary in Trowbridge on the night of Wednesday 3rd October 1979.

Kellam had joined the police service at the age of 31, in November 1978. He was married, with two young children, and was described as a mature, mild mannered man of good physical build. He took to his new career with enthusiasm and, after training, was posted to Trowbridge in February 1979.

On the night of his death, PC Kellam was detailed for duty from 4pm until midnight. Before leaving Trowbridge Police Station he was briefed to patrol Trowbridge Town Centre for a few hours and return for a meal in the police station at 7pm. After eating his supper and writing a few reports, he resumed outside duties, returning to the station for five minutes at 9.30pm.

An eyewitness later reported that, at about 10.30pm, Police Constable Kellam had been walking towards Church Walk, Fore Street. A second witness claimed that Kellam had been looking into the window of the Ramsbury Building Society at 10.35pm.

Shortly after these last sightings, Police Constable Kellam entered St. James' Church Yard. At 10.39pm a civilian operator at Divisional Police Headquarters in Chippenham, received a radio message which said that a police officer needed urgent assistance in 'Church Street'.

A minute later, a motorist noticed Desmond Kellam lying on the pavement outside the Evening Chronicle Offices, Church Street. An ambulance was quickly on the scene – but by then it was too late. Desmond Kellam was dead.

Police Constable Peter Hume and Police Dog 'Sabre' were called to the scene. They followed a trail of blood into the Churchyard and found the police Constable's helmet and torch on the ground. The trail continued to the rear of 'W.H. Smith', where evidence of an attempted burglary was found. In the darkness it appeared that an external extractor fan had recently been damaged – probably with an axe-like tool.

Later, witnesses reported seeing a fight. One man had staggered away while another, younger man, ran off. The following day, as a result of investigations, a nineteen year old male was arrested at a house in West Ashton Road, Trowbridge. His fingerprints were found at the scene and paint found on a 'Stafford billhook' in the house matched samples taken from the door at the rear of 'W.H. Smith'. Identical particles of paint were found in Police Constable Kellam's head wound.

The young man was charged with murder. He appeared before Bristol Crown Court on 23rd April 1980, but was found not guilty. He did, however, plead guilty to manslaughter and other offences and was sentenced to eight years imprisonment.

Chief Inspector Peter Sandall (now retired) later recalled: 'Those of us who were serving at that time remember the stunning effect on the Force; the overwhelming response from the public, who were calling in to police stations all over the County to offer sympathy and make donations, even before a fund was set up. Police officers were returning to duty voluntarily from leave, rest days and courses, offering to help in any way.'

## A DECADE OF UNREST

The 1980s saw three new Chief Constables in eight years. This compared with the previous three Chief Constables, who had given a total of over 70 years service between them.

Mr Kenneth Mayer took his appointment on 1st October 1979. He had joined the police in 1949, and had served with the Metropolitan Police, Somerset Constabulary and Bedfordshire and Luton Constabulary. At the Home Office he had been an Assistant to Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary.

Under Mayer, a new period of development began. In his first year he was able to report that the number of police officers had risen to the authorised level for the first time since 1952.

Mayer sought to deploy his officers on duties that reflected public needs. A research project was undertaken to discover the numbers of police officers involved in administrative work, the result of which would prove the case for employing more civilian police staff.

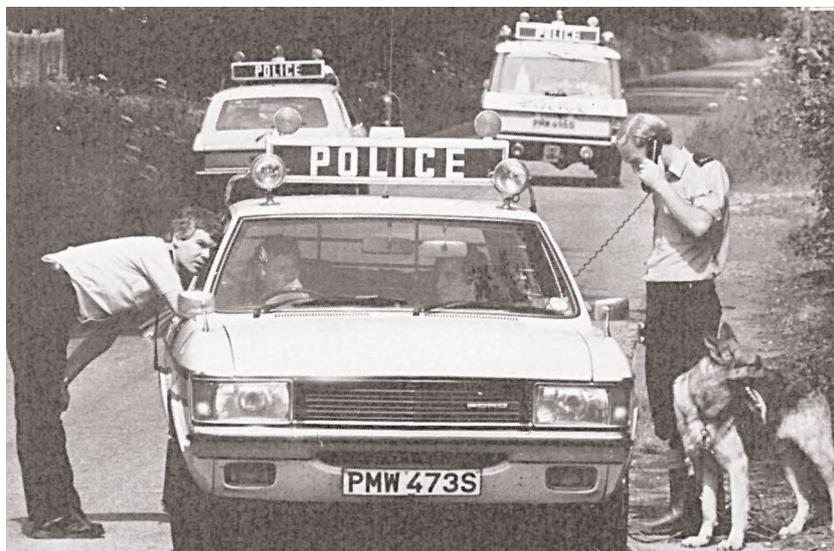
Policing of industrial disputes was to feature throughout the decade. During 1980, for instance, a large number of police officers were taken from their patrol duties due to ensure order while the prison officers were on strike. A substantial number of prisoners had to be kept in police cells. At Rollestone Camp, on Salisbury Plain, military accommodation was turned into a temporary prison. A contingent of police officers was required to patrol the new prison.

A second prison officers dispute, in 1986, affected Erlestoke Prison. During the course of the dispute, rioting and mass escapes took place. A large amount of police time was taken up with restoring order and tracing the escapees.

Kenneth Mayer made it clear that he was concerned about the deteriorating public order situation at Stonehenge. In his annual report he referred to 'the hard core of free-living drug users who bring a flavour of sordid mysticism to the fields adjacent to the Stonehenge site. As is often the case on such occasions many ordinary, decent young people form an unwitting shield for unlawful activities by, in this case, a dissident few hundred.'

In 1985 Mayer's successor as Chief Constable, Donald Smith, took steps to alleviate this public order problem. Wiltshire Constabulary continues to work with English Heritage to police the Summer Solstice.

Partly as a result of the public order problems at Stonehenge, Parliament enacted a Public Order Act in 1986. However, as time would show, a significant factor in reducing the problems at Stonehenge was the ability of the police and English Heritage to work in partnership with firm and efficient policing.



**Police officers being briefed at the scene of an incident in July 1980. Vehicles shown include two Ford Granadas and a Range Rover.**  
*Picture supplied by Wiltshire Constabulary.*



**Post coding of bicycles in 1984, as part of the crime reduction campaign in Marlborough. Crime reduction has taken a step forward in recent years with the massive expansion of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes, Community Safety Partnerships, Crime and Disorder Partnerships and crime reduction partnerships led by local residents.**

*Picture supplied by Wiltshire Newspapers.*

During the 1990s management staff from English Heritage, the local police Commander and other agencies opened discussions with representatives of the various Druid bodies, religious organisations and travellers groups. This resulted in a calming of the situation and a controlled admission to Stonehenge area for Solstice celebrations.

Elsewhere, recorded crimes rose steadily during the decade. In 1980 it increased by nearly 2%, including more incidents of a violent nature. Police officers themselves were subject to a large number of assaults. 120 officers were assaulted while on duty, of whom 43 suffered actual bodily harm during 1980 alone.

A Community Relations Inspector at Headquarters was employed to encourage the involvement of police in their local communities and, to cement the relationship between the police and the public, three pilot 'Local Consultative Groups' were established in 1983. Two years later community safety took a step forward, with the appointment of an Inspector to co-ordinate the Force's crime reduction role.

Putting more police back into the community was made possible by a programme of 'civillianisation' – taking police officers out of administrative roles and replacing them with civilian police staff. In this way 28 more officers could be released from non-operational roles and put back on the beat in the period from 1982 to 1984. Between 1985 and 1989, nearly eighty more were put on the beat as a result of the programme.

In September 1983, Chief Constable Kenneth Mayer retired and was replaced by Chief Constable Donald Smith. Smith came to Wiltshire from Avon and Somerset Constabulary, where he had been Deputy Chief Constable. He had joined the Metropolitan Police in 1951, rising through the ranks to the position of Chief Superintendent. In November 1969 he was appointed Assistant Chief Constable of Somerset and Bath Constabulary, and became Deputy Chief Constable of the Avon and Somerset Constabulary six years later.

The development of targeting specific crimes continued in 1984 when police officers in rural areas were instructed to spend more time in providing a 'presence' to discourage thefts from motor cars at beauty spots like Avebury, West Kennet and Stonehenge. For a County like Wiltshire, in which tourism was now a major industry, this was a significant problem. The new policy had a marked effect on such thefts.

In addition to the Police National Computer, 'micro computers' were now being used for administrative tasks. A word processor was purchased in 1981 and a civilian operator employed. Another was acquired to deal with the personnel records of the Force. More significantly, a Command and Control system was acquired to improve message handling and accelerate the deployment of officers to local incidents.

The Command and Control system was delivered to Force Headquarters in December 1984, and was being fully utilised by the end of the year. A feasibility study was also initiated into the potential use of the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System (HOLMES) in major incident rooms. The study was completed 1985 and an order was placed soon afterwards.

The Chief Constable's reports during the decade are punctuated with remarks about the number of deaths among motorists. This was to become a major theme throughout the next few decades. The wearing of seat belts, which became compulsory during the 1980s, led to a rapid decrease in the severity of road collision injuries. But the incidence of young pedal cyclists killed or injured on local roads still caused concern.

The Chief Constable remarked in 1984 that an increase in road traffic collisions of 10% in 1984 was due to the number of drivers failing to comply with traffic signs and overtaking improperly. Over 230 of the drivers involved in collisions were over the permitted alcohol limit.

Road traffic collisions were only part of the problem for the police in 1984. Peace demonstrations at Greenham Common, where the United States had stationed nuclear Cruise missiles, came over the border into Wiltshire. Meanwhile Government plans to close the coal mines resulted in a national miner's strike. Wiltshire was again asked to provide mutual aid to other Forces. Crime rates were rising again – up 6.7%. However, on the bright side, the detection rate also rose and Wiltshire Constabulary solved 500 offences more than the previous year.

During the year the Drugs Squad was devolved, giving responsibility for day-to-day activity to senior Divisional CID officers. A Detective Chief Inspector, based at Devizes Police Headquarters, was allocated to examine trends in drug abuse.

Officers had to cope with revised shift patterns and workday rosters as a result of the introduction of the new policing methods. For recruits, a national probationary training programme had been introduced. Although welcome, the move took more experienced officers off the beat.

In 1986, South Wiltshire landowners obtained injunctions to prevent travellers from setting foot on property in the vicinity of Stonehenge. This resulted in a confrontation between the police and the would-be festival goers in May.

An initial gathering was dispersed by Wiltshire Police, but the problem then became a regional one as the 'Peace Convoy' moved into Somerset, Dorset and finally Hampshire. Wiltshire Constabulary not only found themselves calling on other Forces for mutual aid, but were called into neighbouring Counties to help police the Convoy. A protest parade was later held in Salisbury, and a confrontation between the police and the festival goers resulted in over 200 arrests.

1986 ended with a number of murder investigations. The horrific double murder of a young mother and her child at Westbury engaged the attention of detectives, while two unrelated murders occurred in the City of Salisbury within 24 hours. Major investigations were mounted and the HOLMES major incident computer was used – with the result that all of the murders were detected.

The following year an Irish Republican Army Active Service Unit began operations in South West England. One of its aims was to assassinate the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whose farm was near Chippenham.

A rider spotted the three terrorists as they watched their target from a hill overlooking the farm. The suspicious behaviour was reported to the police and the three terrorists were soon arrested.

A long and complex enquiry, codenamed Operation Jannik, followed. The investigation involved many police officers and several other police forces – including the Metropolitan Police and Special Branch. Over 1,000 exhibits and 800 witness statements were taken. The turning point in the investigation was the discovery of a motorcar at Wookey Hole, in Somerset, which contained much of the evidence. The ensuing trial at Winchester Crown Court resulted in the three being convicted and imprisoned for conspiracy to murder.

The presence of United States Cruise missiles at Greenham Common in Berkshire, was a continuing source of protest by local Peace campaigners. Demonstrators took their campaign of opposition onto the roads, often late at night, to prevent weapon deployment exercises on Salisbury Plain. Wiltshire Constabulary had to ensure the roads were kept open. The problem continued until the monthly movement of missile convoys from Greenham Common onto the Plain ended in July 1990, as the Warsaw Pact countries edged towards democracy.

In 1988, following consultations with courts and other legal agencies, Chippenham Division began a pilot scheme in the tape recording of police interviews with suspects. The project was a great success and a further 17 interview rooms were constructed across Wiltshire.

Chief Constable Donald Smith retired in June 1988, and was replaced by Walter Girven, the former Deputy Chief Constable of Dorset Police. The new Chief Constable had begun his policing career on Merseyside.

The next ten years were to be a testing time for the new Chief Constable. The period was to be marked by inadequate financial resources from Central Government, combined with rapid technological, scientific and cultural changes. The decade was also to see the further development of community involvement in crime reduction, through partnerships between the police, local Councils and other agencies.

In Girven's first annual report to the Home Secretary he commented on the growth of 'Neighbourhood Watch' schemes, which had first been introduced in 1986. Often initiated by concerned local citizens and crime reduction officers, the 530 schemes enabled communities to become practically involved in crime reduction. 'It is clear that the existence of 'Neighbourhood Watch' schemes has increased the awareness of crime prevention measures and assisted in reducing the fear of crime,' he said.



**Swindon Control room staff in July 1987. The separate Divisional control rooms were amalgamated into one central control room at Devizes and a separate control centre for Swindon and the M4 motorway at Westlea in the 1990s. Now there is a single Emergency Services Control Room at London Road, Devizes, opened by the Duchess of Gloucester in November 2003.**

*Picture supplied by Wiltshire Newspapers.*

One of Wiltshire Constabulary's first helicopters/Air Ambulance's, a Gazelle, is pictured as it prepares to evacuate a casualty from the scene of an accident during the Summer Solstice in the late 1980s.

Picture supplied by Wiltshire Constabulary.



Other schemes on the 'Watch' theme were to follow. 'Farm Watch' was launched in Amesbury while, in North Wiltshire, a 'Lake Watch' scheme was introduced for the Cotswold Water Park. 'Canal Watch' was instigated in Devizes, followed by 'Pub Watch' and 'Church Watch' schemes in Salisbury Division. By 2003, approximately 75,000 homes would be covered by 'Neighbourhood Watch' schemes – over a third of all the homes in Wiltshire.

Every Chief Constable has a special skill or expertise. Girven's particular interest, for which he gained national recognition, was in traffic. In 1988 the Chief Constable remarked upon the growing numbers of road traffic collision fatalities. He believed that excess speed was the main underlying cause of serious road collisions and he was quick to ensure that reducing speed and catching offenders were key goals for the Force. Girven's humane streak was manifest in his enthusiasm for providing more support to the victims of crime and road collisions. The following year, the Force appointed liaison officers to work alongside the families and victims involved in fatal collisions. Reducing road traffic casualties would continue to be an important theme throughout the 1990s and beyond.

Wiltshire Constabulary celebrated its 150th anniversary, in 1989, in grand style. More than 5,000 people attended a Force Open Day, and the first edition of *The Oldest and The Best – The History of Wiltshire Constabulary 1839-1989* was published. The Force received its own a Heraldic Standard and a Grant of Arms.

Across Britain there was growing public concern over the safety of children. In 1989 the Government introduced The Children Act. Together with an increase in cases reported to the police as a result of telephone 'help lines' for children, the Act led to increased co-operation between the police and Wiltshire Social Services.

The threat posed by Irish Republican violence continued to be a concern. Bombings at Colchester and Deal had shown that terrorists were increasing their activities against so-called 'soft' targets on the UK mainland. With many senior military officers and garrison towns in the County, Wiltshire was regarded as a prime target. In July the threat to the County increased. Another politician with property in Wiltshire became Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He immediately required a high degree of personal protection from an already over-stretched local Force.

The 1980s ended with a serious fire at The Maltings Shopping Centre in Salisbury. The fire started in a greengrocer's shop and soon spread to the rest of the shopping centre. Flames could be seen for miles. Police officers were able to evacuate 13 elderly and disabled people from flats above the shopping centre, while 145 firemen and 25 fire appliances tried to bring the blaze under control. Three officers later received Chief Constable's Commendations for their actions on the night.



These letters patent, granting armorial ensigns, and this heraldic standard, were presented to the Wiltshire Constabulary on Wednesday 29th. November, 1989, to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the formation of this First County Force to be created under the Police Act 1839.

**Primus Et Optimus.**

**W.R. Girven, O.P.M., LL.B. FB.I.M.,**  
Chief Constable

**A.S.G. Blackmore, J.P., D.A., FR.I.B.A.,**  
Chairman of The Police Authority

Photograph by Cathryn Martin.

## FACING THE FUTURE

In 1990 the Chief Constable adopted a national 'Statement of Common Purpose and Values'. The aim of the Statement was to impose a set of standards for all members of the staff – uniformed and civilian police staff.

Walter Girven also initiated a programme of public consultation, the results of which confirmed his view that the public wanted a more visible police presence. Meeting public expectations would require more funding. He told the Home Secretary, 'Our ability to sustain an effective policing operation rests heavily on providing adequate support in the form of technology and equipment for existing staff. Financial constraints imposed by Central Government have, once again, limited our ability to expand in this area.' Financial support from Government did not improve, however, and the Chief Constable was soon forced to make cuts in the number of police and civilian police staff.

In the fight against terrorism, vigilance by two Wiltshire police officers resulted in the arrest of two Irish Republican terrorists at Stonehenge car park in 1990. The Metropolitan Police later interviewed the two and other arrests were made in London for various offences related to terrorism.

The threat from terrorism didn't always come from Irish Republicans. In June 1990, Animal Liberation Front bombers detonated a device beneath a private motor vehicle in the village of Winterslow, near Salisbury. The vehicle, which was owned by a veterinary surgeon employed at the Porton Down Research Establishment, was destroyed in the ensuing fire. Four days later a similar bomb was detonated beneath the car of a veterinary researcher at Bristol University, severely injuring a 13-month-old child.

HOLMES, the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System, linked the type of explosive used in the June bombs with the explosive used in a bomb at Bristol in February 1989. Because of the similarity between the crimes, a joint major incident team was set up between the Wiltshire Force and Avon and Somerset Police. The offenders were eventually caught, prosecuted and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

Large-scale public demonstrations broke out across Wiltshire during 1990 in protest against the new Community Charge or 'Poll Tax'. Although a change in the rating system had been long overdue, the new system was deeply unpopular and led to public disorder outside Council meetings called to set the new tax. There were disturbances at Swindon, Trowbridge and Salisbury, where a large crowd of up to 300 local demonstrators packed the City's Guildhall Square to protest against the new tax.



**Chief Constable Girven (second from right) presents long-service medals to WSC Rita Maple, SC Kevin Richards and Section Officer Paul Carter in 1991.**

*Photograph Courtesy of the Salisbury Journal.*



**Officers attend the scene of a road traffic collision. The police vehicle shown is a Volvo Estate.**

**The Photographic Department at Police Headquarters provides an essential service to Crime Scene Investigators and the Force generally.**



In 1991, War broke out in the Middle East as Iraq invaded the tiny oil-rich State of Kuwait. The conflict, thousands of miles away, had an impact on Wiltshire, where officers from Salisbury Division were involved in detaining a number of Iraqi nationals. Rolleston Camp, near Shrewton, was brought back into use as a holding centre for detainees. Later that year a massive security operation was mounted in Salisbury City Centre as 1,200 victorious Gulf War veterans returned from the Gulf for a thanksgiving service in Salisbury Cathedral.

Meanwhile Swindon had continued to develop as one of the fastest growing areas in Europe. With jobs came the need for homes and support services. There was a commensurate increase in the number of crimes reported to the police in Swindon Division. The area's affluence and thriving commercial sector was a magnet for fraud and computer-related crime. In 1991 alone the number of reported crimes involving cheques rose by 110% and a specialist 'Financial Investigation Unit' was set up to deal with these types of crime.

Road traffic collisions continued to be a major concern for the police and, in 1991, the people of Swindon were reminded once more that 'Speed Kills' after a tragic collision in Moredon. Five local children were killed when a speeding car left the road and hit them just yards from their homes in Akers Way, Moredon. The town went into mourning and several Swindon officers had to receive counselling. Two men were later charged with offences connected with the collision, but tensions within the community remained high. The following week between 600 and 700 people protested against traffic speeds in the area.

The 1990s were a period of increased public consultation. For the first time, in 1992, the results of an opinion poll about public perceptions of the Force. Over 2,000 members of the public responded to the survey. There was widespread satisfaction with the performance of the Force, even among offenders, but 85% of respondents felt more police time should be spent on foot patrol.

In 1992, ten years after the first mini computers entered the police service, a project team was formed to implement a Force wide computer system. The aim of the project was to develop a system to assist with the reporting and recording of crime, court file preparation, prisoner handling and intelligence. This project, and later work on new and improved computer systems, set the Force on the road to a fully integrated network, which is the nerve system of modern policing.

The police service never forgets its heroes and in 1992, Warminster Sub Division commemorated the 100th Anniversary of the murder of Sergeant Enos Molden, with the laying of a wreath at Molden's grave.

The crime of arson was of major concern during the course of the year. In January, the most expensive crime in the history of Wiltshire Constabulary occurred when an aircraft hangar at RAF Hullavington burned down causing £19 million worth of damage. Meanwhile, in Trowbridge, investigations began into a series of 70 barn fires which had caused over £1.5 million of damage. Later a 23-year-old man was arrested. He admitted more than 240 offences over a period of six years.

New Year's Eve has always required careful policing. A combination of accumulated late nights, excessive alcohol consumption and high spirits is a heady cocktail. On New Year's Eve 1992, a large police presence was required to bring order to a 'rave' party at Littlecote House. The same night a major fire broke out at a property in Marlborough High Street. The blaze threatened one of Wiltshire's finest streets and large crowds congregated in the area to watch the spectacle. Within half an hour a number of special constables arrived in Force to support the regular officers.

Throughout the year, the national media featured the effects of excessive public drunkenness. A spate of anti-social behaviour by 'Lager Louts' in rural towns received considerable publicity. To combat these problems, Councillors in Salisbury introduced a new byelaw to prohibit public drinking in the City. The byelaw resulted in a decline in rowdiness in the centre of the City. Other Wiltshire towns were to follow Salisbury's example.

Meanwhile 1993 was a year of unparalleled success for Swindon Town Football Club, who won promotion to the FA Premier League. The town rejoiced with a huge procession through Swindon involving thousands of supporters. Sadly a Swindon fan was struck by a car in Victoria Road. The driver of the vehicle failed to stop and was arrested the following day.



**The installation of safety cameras in the 1990s was designed to reduce traffic speeds at locations with a history of collisions.**

For much of 1993 the Fingerprint Bureau prepared for the installation of an Automated Fingerprint Recognition system (AFR). Fingerprint officers travelling to America to monitor the conversion of 29,000 existing records to a suitable format for the new computer system. The new AFR system linked Wiltshire with 39 other Forces and allowed marks from scenes of crimes to be matched against local and national records.

A new police station, to serve the populations of West and North Swindon, was opened at Westlea during 1994. Officers began moving into the building during the early part of 1995, as the demands of policing a rapidly expanding town increased.

Concern had been expressed for some time about the level of violence against police officers. The Police Federation pressed for its members to be issued with better personal protection equipment. During 1994 body armour, extendable metal ASP batons and Kwik-Kufs were acquired. The Kwik-Kufs were generally regarded as more effective than the old-style handcuffs, but led to a growing number of complaints from prisoners complaining of wrist injuries. Later, officers were issued with CS Spray canisters, webbing belts to carry their equipment and improved radio communications equipment.

1994 saw the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. The new law modified a suspect's right to remain silent, curbed abuses of bail, introduced DNA sampling powers and extended police powers to deal with pornography and obscenity.

The legislation also included powers to assist in the fight against terrorism and the problems of trespass often associated with 'New Age' travellers. The Chief Constable commented that the Act would have 'a significant effect on the powers of the police to combat criminal activity.' It would be 'particularly helpful for the policing of the Summer Solstice at Stonehenge.

After 30 years, the Police Authority's status as a Committee of the Wiltshire County Council was ended in 1995. The new Authority comprised elected members, Magistrates and five 'independent' members approved by the Home Secretary. New legislation required the new Police Authority to publish an Annual Policing Plan, reflecting national objectives set by the Home Secretary, and local objectives set by the Police Authority and Chief Constable.

One of the first problems to be confronted by the new Police Authority was funding the Force. It was to be a particularly hard year financially, caused by restrictions in Home Office funding. This resulted in a shortfall of almost £3 million in the budget and with it, proposed losses of 60 officers and 40 civilian police staff. For reasons of efficiency, control rooms at Chippenham and Salisbury were closed and their functions merged into one Force-wide control room at Devizes. A subsidiary control room for Swindon and the M4 was retained at Westlea.

Although the Chief Constable was forced to make cuts in his budget, Home Office grants became available for favoured projects. Salisbury District Council installed Closed Circuit TV cameras (CCTV) in the City Centre and its car parks. Chief Constable Girven launched the scheme and described it as 'outstanding'. Within months there was a sharp decrease in crime levels and, thanks to videotape evidence, an increase in detection rates.

The new Criminal Justice and Public Order Act meant that officers were able to make DNA records of suspects and offenders. In May 1995 Swindon became the first Division to detect a crime using the new DNA database. Traces of blood were located at a burglary and these, when checked against the database, revealed the identity of an offender.

Meanwhile, old-fashioned hard work and persistence by detectives paid off for Swindon Division in a case that broke all precedents. Allegations were made that a Punjabi man living in the town had murdered his wife in India.

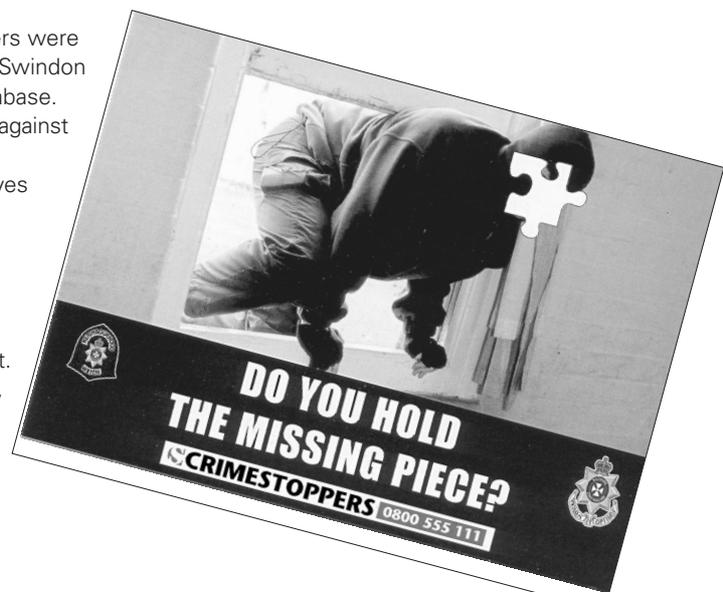
A team of eight police officers made numerous trips to India for periods of up to five weeks to complete their investigations. The officers experienced difficulties with heat, illness, food and transport. Their work schedule was often hectic, working up to 14 hours a day, and involved visits to remote villages in the Punjab. A total of 23 witnesses were located and encouraged to give evidence in a British Court. The man was later convicted of murder and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment.



**A Crime Scene Investigator (CSI) watches as a police laboratory technician photographs an exhibit.**

*Photograph by Cathryn Martin.*

**The Crimestoppers initiative has enabled information about crimes to be passed to the police in a confidential way.**





**A traffic officer breathalyses a motorcyclist in 1999. The photograph was taken at Sandy Lane, near Devizes, for a recruitment drive and the motorcyclist was a willing participant.**

*Photograph by Cathryn Martin.*



**Chief Constable Dame Elizabeth Neville assumed command in April 1997 – Britain's second female Chief Constable. Her contribution to policing in Wiltshire and the national stage was recognised formally in the New Years Honours List 2003 when she became Dame Elizabeth Neville.**

*Photograph by Peter Charman.*

In March 1996 Wiltshire Constabulary adopted the Crimestoppers initiative. The scheme enables the public to provide information anonymously through a national Crimestoppers telephone number.

The following month, after 18 months of construction, a new police station at Marlborough was opened. Excess speed continued to be a concern for officers in the town and throughout the Force. High vehicle speeds were responsible for the deaths of too many motorists. The County Council and police began to install remote speed enforcement technology, or safety cameras, near collision hot spots. Safety cameras had a significant effect on reducing speed and serious collisions fell in many dangerous locations.

The Chief Constable's sustained concentration on reducing road traffic speed through the 1990s was reflected in a reducing number of road traffic fatalities. But Walter Girven was still concerned that the message wasn't getting through to young drivers. In 1996 he reported to the Home Secretary on the case of a young man at Melksham who was booked for speeding three times within an hour and a half. Another offender had started his driving career by getting his first speeding ticket within an hour of passing his driving test!

The mass shooting of school children at the village of Dunblane in 1996 was the catalyst for the reform of firearms legislation. The possession of firearms prohibited by the new legislation required owners to surrender them to the police in the ensuing months. Wiltshire Constabulary received around nine tons of guns and ammunition surrendered under the terms of the new legislation.

The supply and distribution of illegal drugs, and drug-related crime, continued to have a significant effect on the work of the Force during the 1990s. Large numbers of burglaries and property-related crimes were being committed to feed drug addiction. Accordingly, the Force placed great emphasis on the detection of such offences. In December 1996, officers from all over Wiltshire took part in a typical operation against drug traffickers.

In Swindon the objective was to arrest drug dealers and handlers of stolen property. Nineteen search warrants were executed in and around the town, involving 120 officers. Seventeen people were arrested and in three houses around 150 cannabis plants were discovered.

The disappearance of nine-year-old Zoë Evans from her home at Warminster, the following month, led to the largest and most intensive search ever conducted by the Wiltshire Constabulary. During a 52-day search, volunteers, military personnel and police officers from Wiltshire and the surrounding Counties, spent thousands of hours examining the fields, rivers and hillsides around the town. Tragically, Zoë's body was found in February, during an organised police line search.

Even before the body was found, Zoë's stepfather was charged with her murder and, in 1998, he was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. The Chief Constable later commended no less than 51 officers for their part in the successful investigation.

It was one of the last major operations for Mr Girven. Having served as Chief Constable for nine years, he retired in March 1997. In making his replacement, Wiltshire Police Authority became only the second Authority in the Country to appoint a female Chief Constable. A selection committee of three Councillors, one Magistrate and an independent was appointed by Wiltshire Police Authority to make the decision. The panel met in April 1997 and voted unanimously to appoint Miss, now Dame, Elizabeth Neville as the new Chief Constable.

Miss Neville had begun her police career with the Metropolitan Police, moving on to Thames Valley Police and then to Sussex Constabulary. She joined Wiltshire from Northamptonshire Constabulary, where she had been identified as an outstanding Deputy Chief Constable.

One of the areas that immediately caught the attention of the new Chief Constable was the 'hidden' crime of domestic violence. Specially trained officers had already been established in each division to deal with victims of such crimes. The new Chief Constable was influenced by national research, which showed that the police did not become involved in domestic violence until the victim had suffered 35 attacks. The Chief Constable's focus on domestic violence was to result in an increase in the number of victims coming forward to report incidents.



**The Bobby Van, a Ford Transit, helps the victims of crime to repair property damage and install locks and crime reduction equipment.**

*Photograph by Cathryn Martin.*

The policing of pubs, clubs and licensed premises was stepped up during the year with the development of 'Pub Watch' schemes. Officers were to patrol areas near clubs and pubs, wearing high visibility jackets to reassure the public. The Chief Constable commented: 'We are aiming to increase the feeling of well-being of those who live near pubs and night clubs and those who just want to enjoy a trouble free night out.'

Wiltshire Police were in the headlines once again as two Tamworth pigs, nicknamed 'Butch' and 'Sundance', escaped from an abattoir in Malmesbury during January 1998. The two made their escape by swimming the River Avon and evading capture for no less than eight days. Officers involved in the chase were subjected to the focus of the international press. The San Francisco Chronicle headlined the story 'Pigs Mad Dash for Freedom'. At the time of writing, the 'Tamworth Two' are living in an animal sanctuary in Kent.

The new Chief Constable rolled up her sleeves and took direct command of an emergency in Chippenham during the following month. Two live Second World War bombs were uncovered at Chippenham during building work on a new school. An 800 yard safety cordon was set up and more than 1,000 people were evacuated to safety as bomb disposal experts were called in. 78 local residents had to be housed during the course of the emergency and officers closed the A4. The German bombs were finally destroyed in a controlled explosion.

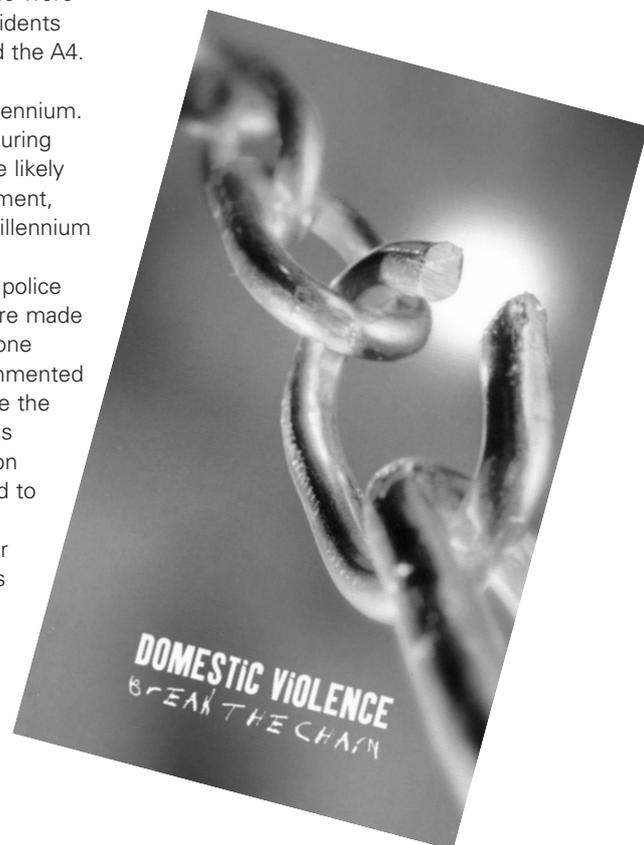
Meanwhile preparations got underway for the transition to a new Millennium. Concerns were twofold. Firstly, there were concerns about public order during New Year's Eve, 1999. Secondly, there were gloomy predictions about the likely effect of a millennium computer 'bug' on electronic equipment. All equipment, from traffic lights through to radio sets, had to be checked and proved 'millennium compliant'. In the event, there were to be few difficulties.

The success of joint operations with the Ambulance Service over the police helicopter had generated a climate of co-operation. In 1998 proposals were made for the police, fire and ambulance control room staff to work together in one building on land at Devizes Police Headquarters. The Chief Constable commented that the proposals were designed to speed up response times and ensure the most appropriate response to emergency incidents. Detailed planning was commenced and, a few months later, the project was awarded £2.6 million from the Invest to Save budget. In 2001 Llewellyn House was demolished to make way for the new facility. The new building opened in June 2003.

The new Chief Constable shared Chief Constable Girven's concern for the victims of crime and in 1998 Wiltshire Constabulary launched Britain's first 'Bobby Van'. The aim was to visit the victims of crime to help repair broken windows or fit new locks.

Divisional boundaries were realigned with local authority boundaries as a result of a new Crime and Disorder Act, which came into force in July 1999. The Act required mechanisms to be put into place to prevent young people offending. The police and other agencies were required to establish Youth Offending Teams to prevent young people becoming persistent offenders.

**Domestic violence is a major priority for Wiltshire officers.**





**A traffic officer uses a speed detection device to apprehend speeding motorists at Steeple Ashton.**

*Photograph by Cathryn Martin.*



**A haul of drugs seized in a police raid.**

During the year the Macpherson Inquiry reported into the circumstances surrounding the murder in London of a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, and subsequent police investigation. The report, which drew attention to allegations of 'institutionalised racism' in the Metropolitan Police, was to have significant consequences. The Chief Constable immediately set about investigating ways in which lessons could be learned.

The diversity of the local Wiltshire population had changed considerably over the previous decades and the Force now needed to address the policing requirements of an increasing diverse community.

The needs and aspirations of young people, those with disabilities, older people, ethnic groups, gay and lesbian people all needed to be addressed. During the course of the year, twelve officers took up their voluntary role as gay and lesbian liaison officers and, in June 1999, the Wiltshire Black Police Association was launched. Later, the Chief Constable appointed a diversity officer to co-ordinate the action plans drawn up in response to the Macpherson Report.

In early 2000, the Home Secretary set a new ministerial priority to build trust between the police and ethnic communities. In Wiltshire the increase in confidence felt by members of minority communities contributed to a rise in the number of reported crimes of a racist nature. In March the Force published an Equality of Service Delivery Policy which recognised that 'some people within our community are particularly vulnerable to victimisation and may have historically found it more difficult to seek assistance from the police.'

Police officers continued to deal with problems of excess speed on Wiltshire roads. A Driver Improvement Scheme was now being offered to drivers involved in road collisions. Many offenders regarded the scheme as preferable to being prosecuted for careless driving.

In the early part of the year falling detection rates for domestic burglaries and violent crimes were attributed to new 'three strikes and you're out' legislation. Offenders could no longer see any benefit in admitting to crimes they had previously committed, since disclosure would now mean almost certain imprisonment.

During the year 2000, the Force investigated eight complex murders and suspicious deaths. Including the attack on a young black man by serving soldiers and an alleged abduction and murder.

The War on drugs continued in 2001 with the creation of a Drug Referral Scheme aimed at reducing the level of drugs misuse and associated crime by referring offenders to appropriate treatment.

Domestic violence continued to be a priority. Wiltshire Police attended 5,500 domestic violence incidents – but new research had suggested that the true level of the problem could be as high as 30,000 incidents a year. In response, a Domestic Violence Intervention Partnership was launched in October 2002.

In December 2001, civic leaders from around the County converged on Devizes for the stone laying ceremony of the new Wiltshire Emergency Services Communication Centre. At the time of writing the Communications Centre is open with two of the three services already working in the building. The Fire Service is due to follow in 2004.

Throughout its history, the Wiltshire Constabulary has seen many developments and has grown from an initial 200 officers in 1839 to around 1220 police officers, 167 special constables and 885 civilian police staff today. With the development of the Wiltshire Communication Centre, a new age was about to begin.

Finally in early 2003 Elizabeth Neville's contribution to policing in Wiltshire and the national stage was recognised in the New Years Honours List 2003 when she became Dame Elizabeth Neville.

## TRAINS, PLANES AND AUTOMOBILES

A police officer's most reliable form of transport has always been his feet. In the 1800s constables would often walk dozens of miles a week. The constable had to walk to the edge of his district in order to exchange news and information with his neighbouring colleague. Often miles from the nearest railway station, the constable was also required to tramp half way across the County to police a major event or demonstration.



**One of the four wheel spring carts which acted as the standard transport for Superintendents in the early part of the 20th Century. A police constable was used as the groom/driver.**

In wet weather, rain would be soaked up by heavy blue serge trousers and the great coat – doubling the weight of his already heavy clothing. At night there would be a lamp to carry as well as a truncheon or staff.

Prisoners would be escorted by a police constable from prison to prison. Later, carts were hired for this purpose. The first comfortable means of transport provided for Wiltshire Constabulary came in 1843.

In that year Chief Constable Samuel Meredith purchased a number of horses and carts for the purpose of conveying prisoners and police officers to and from the courts and gaols. The carts were also used for transporting stores and equipment.

Chief Constable Meredith travelled in more style – although he mostly had to provide it from his own means. Although he was allowed the services of a constable, to act as a coachman, the Chief Constable was only given an allowance of £100 a year to cover the cost of his journeys. This was meant to pay for overnight lodging and horse feed.

It was some time before two wheeled 'spring traps' were bought to enable Divisional Superintendents to visit and supervise the constables under their command. In 1900 the spring carts were replaced by four wheeled carts, which were found to be more stable. H. Willis, the Coachbuilder, in Devizes, built the first of these.

It wasn't long before it was discovered that the four-wheeled traps were too heavy, and in 1908 Chief Constable Höel Llewellyn recommended their replacement with lighter four-wheeled dogcarts.

For ordinary constables, the most significant development was the evolution of the bicycle. Most men, particularly those with large areas to cover, bought their own – finding that they could get around their area much faster by bicycle. However, Wiltshire Constabulary's first bicycle wasn't purchased until 1896 – and then, only for use by Headquarters.

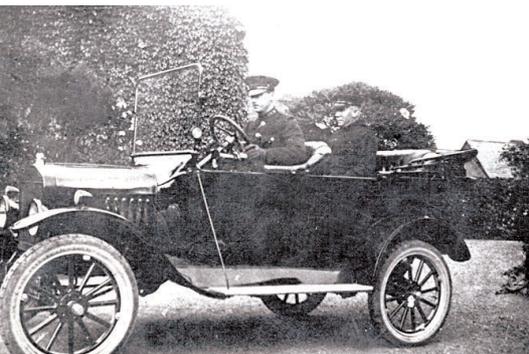


**Left to Right: Constables Martin Tebbett, Janice Butcher and Colin Townsend riding their new bicycles in April 1990. Fifteen bikes were bought that year, at a cost of £1,800. During the 1990s officers in urban areas were encouraged to use bicycles as a more convenient and healthier way of getting about. Mountain bike patrols were introduced in Salisbury's parks and gardens by the special constabulary to prevent and detect vandalism. Picture supplied by Wiltshire Newspapers.**



**Police Constable Joe Halsey, during the celebration procession for George V, in 1910, at Marlborough High Street.**

*Picture supplied by Norman Phillips, Marlborough.*



**A Ford five seat saloon – the first Wiltshire Constabulary car. Purchased in September 1920, it cost £272. It was not, however, the first motorcar to be used in the County on police business. This distinction goes to AM1, a 10hp Benz Motor Car, owned by the Chief Constable, Höel Llewellyn.**

In 1911 the Chief Constable reported to the Standing Joint Committee that nearly all of the constables stationed in rural districts were using their own bicycles for police duty. They received no allowance, he said, unless their duty took them out of their Division – in which case they received one penny a mile.

The Standing Joint Committee agreed that police officers in rural districts should be paid an annual allowance of one pound and ten shillings, while those in towns would receive ten shillings a year (50p).

The arrival of the internal combustion engine was to change the nature of police activity forever. The first motorcar to be used for police purposes in the County belonged to Chief Constable Höel Llewellyn.

In an order to the Force dated 21st May 1908, he said: 'I shall shortly be using my motor car AM 1, colour dark blue, cape cart hood, brass mountings. All officers and constables to enter in their journals the day and time my car passes them on every occasion.'

A year later the police were put on the look-out for speeding – despite the fact that there were, at best, only a handful of cars in the County. Two stopwatches were purchased to provide evidence against speeding motorists, though how policemen were meant to apprehend offenders as they sped past is not clear.

In September 1920 the first police patrol car, a five seater Ford saloon, was purchased. It cost £272 and was allocated for use in the Warminster Division. The division had grown so big that horse drawn transport was no longer suitable for the Superintendent's long journeys to outlying stations.

During the early 1920s the horse drawn vehicles were gradually replaced with Fords, and by 1923 each of the seven districts had been provided with a Ford car for use by the Superintendent.

By now horses were only regularly used for ceremonial duties and race meetings. They were seen less and less on police duty. In 1921 Chief Constable Llewellyn sought the approval of the Standing Joint Committee to equip the stable block at Headquarters as a motor repair shop. Agreement could not be reached, so maintenance of police vehicles continued to be carried out by local garages. By 1927 the Fords were beginning to fall apart. The average mileage was around 42,000 miles and the cars were variously reported as being 'worn out' and 'beyond repair.'

The Austin 12 saloon was chosen as a replacement for the Ford. It had a bigger engine and was considerably faster. With an increasing number of cars on Wiltshire roads it was clear that more police vehicles were needed. The solution, in terms of cost and performance, was the motorbike.

Towards the end of 1929 seven Triumph motorbikes were bought – one for each of the seven divisions. Two years later the fleet was expanded to twelve – with the purchase of five Sunbeams.

In October 1932 the fleet of Austin 12 cars was replaced with Austin 16s and the Triumph motor-bikes were replaced the following year with seven more Sunbeams.

During the early 1930s the Home Secretary requested that the new speed limits should be strictly enforced. Speed limit zones were being imposed around the County, and this was reflected in the role of the police.

In 1935 three MG cars equipped with a second rear view mirror for the co-driver/observer and a rear blind which could be pulled down to display the word 'police', were added to the patrol fleet.

Two years later, in March 1937, the motor patrol fleet comprised of six MG cars and six Sunbeam motorbikes. Each division used an Austin '16' saloon for supervision and general duties. Three of the MGs were replaced in 1938 by Riley 1.5 litre 'Falcon' cars.

In early 1939 the Home Secretary advised all Chief Constables to set up a Traffic and Communications branch – with patrol vehicles administered from the Force HQ. Wiltshire Constabulary did so on 7th May. The Traffic Branch consisted of three Riley Falcons, three Riley Victors and the original six Sunbeam motorcycles – which were now becoming unreliable. Each car had a driver and co-driver.

As the year drew an end, with War clouds on the horizon, the Force sought to replace the ageing Sunbeams. The motorcycles were in such poor repair that the Sunbeam Motor Company refused to accept them in part exchange. As a result, Norton 19s were purchased from F. Sleightholme of Trowbridge, who took the Sunbeams as part of the deal.

As the War got under way, the Home Office instructed all police forces to fit their vehicles with public address systems. During the War years, Wiltshire Constabulary had no choice over the vehicles it drove. The Home Office was responsible for a system of vehicle allocation. Nevertheless in 1941 five Wolseley 14 hp saloons replaced the three Riley Victors and two of the divisional Austin 16 saloons. A year later four more khaki coloured Wolseley 14s were received.

By July 1941, the Headquarters Traffic Department had expanded to 23 men. The department consisted of one Inspector, one Sergeant, 16 regular constables and five War Reserve Constables, one of whom was employed in the maintenance workshop.

Communications were still fairly primitive. Contact with the traffic patrols was maintained through police stations and AA/RAC telephone boxes. While on patrol each crew would arrive at a pre-designated police station or telephone box five minutes before a fixed time and wait for ten minutes, during which time they could be contacted by telephone to receive messages or be directed to an incident.

In 1942 there came an improvement. In that year the Home Office supplied all Forces with short wave radio sets. These were installed in cars and at Divisional Headquarters. Unfortunately, when the War ended, the sets were withdrawn and communication again reverted to the use of telephone points.

A further allocation of four khaki coloured Vauxhall 14 saloons was introduced in 1942. These replaced some of the oldest of the fleet. The four Vauxhalls were allocated to the Divisions, leaving the Force patrol fleet driving four Austin 16s and three Wolseley 14s.

Britain was enabled to fight the War effectively through a programme of Lend Lease extended by the United States of America. Wiltshire Constabulary was a beneficiary, when, in 1943, the ageing Norton motorbikes were replaced by six American Indian models.

With peace came a large amount of surplus Civil Defence equipment. Wiltshire Constabulary benefited with the acquisition of four Ford utility cars.

There were, by now, hundreds of thousands of vehicles on Britain's roads. In January 1946 the Home Secretary wrote to all Chief Constables saying that he considered that every police force should have a special Traffic Department manned by specially trained officers who, in addition to ordinary patrol duties, would carry out detailed studies of road collisions with a view to remedial action being taken.

In Wiltshire the recommendations were adopted fully. In April, Inspector R H Keller was promoted to Chief Inspector and posted from Amesbury to Headquarters to take charge of the Traffic Department. He held the post, being promoted eventually to Chief Superintendent, until his retirement in 1968.

One of his first responsibilities was to have the six Wolseleys and four Austins replaced with Rover 12 Saloons. This was to become the standard police patrol car. The six Indian motorbikes had not performed very well and were sold. A policy decision, reversed a few years later, meant that motorcycles would not be used for patrol work, although three were retained for special escort duties.

In 1948 three more Rover 12s were bought, making a fleet total of thirteen. Each Division had a Rover 12 as a general-purpose car. This was followed by the acquisition of an Austin 25 cwt van for transporting stores and equipment, three lightweight motorcycles for rural beat patrol and seven AJS motorbikes for general duties. The Home Office was now recommending that all Forces should have VHF radio fitted within their vehicles. The size of patrol car fleets should be determined by consideration for the area to be policed.

This meant problems for Wiltshire Constabulary. The fleet needed to number 28 vehicles and the existing Rover 12 cars lacked the power to cope with the weight of the radio sets and the heavy-duty batteries. At first it was thought that a change to the Riley 2.5 litre saloons would solve the problem, but the launch of the much more powerful Rover 75 made a change of manufacturer unnecessary. Towards the end of 1949, the VHF radio scheme became operational. From then there was a phased introduction of radios into all police vehicles.

In 1953 approval was received for a Police Driving School car to be replaced with a Jaguar Mk VII saloon fitted with a Wiltshire Police radio. It was to be used by the Wiltshire Constabulary to provide an escort car when Royalty visited the County.



**Police officers of the Swindon Division in the 1920s outside the Corn Exchange, Salisbury. They were on their way to police Salisbury races.**

*Picture supplied by Peter Daniels, Salisbury.*



**Police Constable Mitchell pictured in 1932 with his patrol motorcycle. The motorcycle fleet consisted of five Sunbeams and seven Triumphs.**



**Police Constable Newman at the scene of a collision in Salisbury Road, Amesbury, in 1935.**



**A Rover 12 patrol car in 1949. The more powerful Rover 75s replaced the Rover 12s.**  
*Picture supplied by Wiltshire Constabulary.*



**Vauxhall Viva panda cars were introduced in 1965 as part of the national 'unit beat' Policing scheme.**

*Picture supplied by Wiltshire Newspapers.*

In December 1954 three Velocette lightweight motorcycles were purchased for rural beat patrols and the following year approval was given for the two Divisional Rover 12s to be replaced by Hillman Huskys.

Two divisional cars were replaced by Vauxhall Velox saloons in December 1956, but in 1957 the high cost of the Rover 75s was discussed. They were simply too expensive to run as patrol cars. They were to be replaced by five Austin A95 saloons and four MG Magnettes. A mixed fleet of A95s and the later A99s with MG Magnettes was operated until early 1963 when the last MG was replaced by an A99.

Velocettes replaced four AJS motorbikes in December 1955, and in 1960 five Triumph Tiger Cub bikes were bought for work on rural patrols. During the 1950s and 1960s the heavy volume of traffic on the roads caused the police considerable difficulties. The problem was especially acute during the holiday season and at weekends. Accordingly, in December 1960, four Triumph 500 cc motor-cycles were purchased and fitted with radios for traffic patrol work.

The decline of the British motorcycle industry in the early 1970s led, invariably, to the replacement of Triumphs and Nortons, with German BMWs. In 1989 Wiltshire Constabulary had twelve 800cc BMW R80 RT bikes, during the 1990s these were replaced with 1000cc BMW K100s, which are still used at the time of writing.

Today, there are five Hondas and four BMW K series bikes. Looking to the future, the longer term plan is for the BMWs to be replaced by Honda Pan European (ST 1100).

In the 1980s the Force employed 12 Range Rover four-wheel drive vehicles. Six were provided for traffic duties, four for work on the M4 and two in other divisions. The vehicles were equipped to cope with major road incidents, with 'repeater' radios, strobe lights, mobile floodlight units and hazard warning lights. The Range Rover also carried a supply of hazard cones, water for overheating cars, first aid kits, towropes and brushes to clean up glass and debris after incidents.

The low cost and wide choice of 4x4 vehicles has led to a reduction in the number of Range Rovers used by the Force. Today each police section has access to a low cost 4x4 vehicle. These are especially valuable in a rural Force where crimes like hare coursing and poaching are a regular feature. Nevertheless, there are still six heavy duty Range Rover Discovery 4x4s employed by the police, including several on specialist operations. One Motorway-equipped Range Rover is still in use.

In 2000 the Force signed a three year partnership with Honda – the Swindon-based car producer. The agreement meant that whenever a police specification motor car was required as a new or replacement vehicle, the Force would regard Honda as their first choice.

During the late 1980s, two Mercedes panelled vans were converted into mobile incident vehicles. One was equipped as a mobile police station – with radio communications, office equipment, computer and catering facilities. The other van was fitted as a communications vehicle. A number of scenes of crime vans, carrying scientific equipment, were purchased – based on the familiar Ford Transit chassis.

With the evolution of DNA sampling, the scenes of crime vehicles required further development. Using a Mercedes van as the basic body, the new scientific vans have mobile laboratory facilities enabling police scientists to conduct analysis of materials left at the scene of a crime. The vehicles also carry mobile refrigeration equipment to enable the preservation of organic materials

The riots of the early 1980s led to a dramatic change in the appearance of police personnel carriers. Whereas previously the vehicles had been used solely as a means of transportation, they were now likely to come under attack. Safety for the passengers became of prime importance. In 1989 the Force used Freight Rover Sherpas with automatic gearbox V8 engines. Most section stations now have Mercedes Vito vans for prisoner transport. These versatile vehicles have four seats in the front portion, with a caged area at the rear.

In addition to its regular fleet and specialist vehicles, the Force has continued to evaluate new vehicles. In 1989, the Wiltshire Constabulary evaluated a Lada Cossack 4x4 vehicle and a Jaguar 3.6 Litre saloon.

By 2003, the Wiltshire Constabulary vehicle fleet consisted of 135 unmarked vehicles and 165 marked vehicles, totalling more than 300 vehicles. Vehicle maintenance is undertaken at our own workshops.

During the last quarter of the 20th Century, Wiltshire Constabulary took the lead in organising Britain's annual Police Fleet Managers Conference. The first event was held at Police Headquarters in 1973, attracting vehicle and equipment manufacturers from around the Country.

The 1990s saw the fight against crime take to the air. The first tentative steps began in the mid 1980s, when the Force began to hire fixed wing aircraft and helicopters for short periods. In October 1987 the Force took part in a joint experiment with the Home Office to evaluate the use of a Robinson Beta 22 helicopter for what were described as 'normal patrol purposes'.

In the summer of the following year a French-built Gazelle helicopter was rented to assist with the policing of the Summer Solstice at Stonehenge. The aircraft was responsible for a number of arrests and saved two lives.

In one example, the aircraft was monitoring traffic on the busy Lacock by-pass when the crew witnessed a head-on collision involving two cars. The helicopter radioed to the emergency services, landed nearby and rushed one of the injured to the Royal United Hospital, Bath.

During 1989 the Force co-operated with Wiltshire Ambulance Service in a four-month evaluation of a Bolkow 105 helicopter. During the experiment the aircraft flew with a crew consisting of a pilot, police observer and paramedic. Nine lives were saved as a result of prompt attention at the scene of an accident and rapid transfer to hospital by helicopter.

In the spring of 1990, the Force formally recognised the role of air operations with the creation of an Air Support Unit. Although 14 other police forces operated aircraft, the Wiltshire ASU was the first to enter into a joint funding and operating scheme in partnership with the local Ambulance Service, which provided 23% of the running costs.

Three years later the ASU moved to new purpose built facilities and a hangar complex at the rear of the Devizes Road site. The aircraft, fitted with global positioning system, enabled the crew to know the location of their aircraft to within 10 metres – especially important when carrying out search procedures in remote area.

Technological improvements to the Bolkow continued during the early 1990s, but by 1996 the Chief Constable was warning that the helicopter was becoming obsolete and would need to be replaced. Later that year McDonald Douglas demonstrated its Explorer helicopter at Police HQ. The aircraft was larger than the previous machine and had no tail rotor. It was equipped with the latest thermal imagery equipment and high magnification video cameras. The new MD 902 Explorer was deployed in the autumn of 1997.

As for the humble bicycle, long gone are the days when a policemen had to purchase his own. Wiltshire Constabulary now owns a number of mountain bikes for use by members of the Force.



**A police Range Rover Motorway patrol crew (PCs Norman Hibberd and Alan Moss) display the contents of their vehicle during the late 1980s. The opening of the M4 put a heavy strain on Wiltshire Constabulary.**



**One of the three Ford Galaxy Community Beat vehicles on station at Urchfont.**

*Photograph by Cathryn Martin.*



**The McDonald Douglas Explorer helicopter coming in to land at Police HQ, Devizes.**

*Photograph by Peter Charman.*

## A MAN'S BEST FRIEND...

In the animal world the horse and the dog have been the most faithful of man's servants. Both have served Wiltshire Constabulary well.

In 1909 His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary raised questions about the lack of a Mounted Branch in the Force. As a result of his concern the Joint Standing Committee decided to equip six mounted constables. The following year the number of constables was increased to twelve.

It is unlikely that the officers operated as full-time mounted police officers, but they were certainly used at the various race courses and point-to-point meetings held in the County. At Salisbury, for instance, the race meetings were notoriously violent and mounted police were invaluable in keeping order. From time to time the mounted officers were loaned to other Forces.

**Members of Wiltshire Constabulary on horseback at Salisbury Races in the early 1920s. Salisbury Races were notorious for trouble and one Superintendent was always armed with a revolver.**



A Superintendent, Sergeant and a number of constables, when required, would take horses from the divisional stations and report for duty at the appointed place.

In addition to keeping the order at race meetings they were also used for ceremonial duties. These included escorting the Judge to and from the Assize Courts at Devizes and Salisbury, and guarding Royal carriages when required.

Unfortunately it is not known when the Wiltshire Mounted Branch was disbanded, but it is very likely that the introduction of cars and motor-bikes in the 1920s signaled the end.

The Wiltshire Constabulary used mounted police for the first time in many years in 1988, at a Swindon Town football match. On that occasion the mounted police were borrowed from the City of London Police under the system of mutual aid.

Dogs have also proved their worth in police service. Chief Constable Höel Llewellyn had two bloodhounds, Moonlight and Flair, which were used in the search for the body of Police Constable Pike after the 1913 murder of Sergeant Crouch.

Officers were encouraged to take dogs with them on their evening patrols early in the century but, again, these were privately owned dogs rather than trained police dogs.

In 1934 the Home Office evaluated the use of dogs and carried out experiments in their use. These trials were suspended with the outbreak of War, only to be resumed when peace came.

In June 1951 the Home Office approved the use of three police dogs in Wiltshire. The dogs were to be stationed at Swindon, Salisbury and Trowbridge.



**Police Constable Jim Whybrow, 'Roger' and Police Constable Edward Potter, in plain clothes, prepare to confront a suspect at Warminster in the early 1950s.**

*Picture supplied by Mrs Potter, Warminster.*



**Police dogs not only travel in vans, but can also be deployed quickly by the police helicopter/air ambulance.**

Police Constable Ted Adcock handled 'Samba' at Swindon. Police Constable Joe Haskey handled 'Duke' at Salisbury and Police Constable Jim Whybrow handled 'Roger' at Trowbridge. The dog section was later disbanded, but in early 1964 three dogs were again available – in Salisbury, Trowbridge and Chippenham.

By 1989 there were fifteen operational police dogs. Twelve German Shepherd dogs were used for general purposes, two Springer Spaniels were used to search for explosives and one was used to search for drugs.

At the time of writing (2003), there are 25 operational police dogs. 12 German Shepherd dogs and one Rottweiler are used for general purposes, 10 Springer Spaniels, four of which are used to search for explosives and six are used to search for drugs and firearms, and one Labrador is used as a passive drugs search dog and one German Shepherd is used solely for firearms work. Handlers, together with their dogs, still work a shift system – enabling them to give maximum operational coverage.

Most of the dogs in today's Force are given by members of the public. They must be well developed and healthy, of sound temperament and between the ages of eight and fourteen months. The dogs and handlers undergo a thirteen week initial training course either at Police Headquarters, Devizes or at Guildford, Surrey. Providing they pass, they then go on to join the Force as police dogs. Throughout their working life, which usually lasts nine years, there are regular refresher courses. On retirement they live with their handlers as family pets.



**Police Constable Chris Burrige and police dog Flynn, who died recently. PC Burrige is now training a German Shepherd puppy called Roxy. A very close bond of trust is established between a dog and its handler.**

## THE GROWING ROLE OF WOMEN



**Detective Sergeant William Cutler of Salisbury City police, together with Mrs Percy and Mrs Shepherd outside Salt Lane police station, Salisbury. The two ladies, in fine Edwardian hats, were employed as matrons to look after the prisoners. Notice the posters advertising missing handbags, watches, rings and a Tabby cat!**  
*Picture supplied by Michael Maidment, Salisbury.*



**Police officer Emma Green Armytage on patrol in Swindon.**

The role of women in the police force has changed significantly over the past 164 years. Until the end of the 19th Century, women were only employed in domestic cooking and cleaning roles. The most adventurous role a woman might expect was to be asked to take care of women prisoners. When the services of women were needed they were employed by the Constabulary on a casual basis.

Policewomen were not felt necessary until staff shortages at the beginning of the First World War. By 1919 however, there were about 150 policewomen in Britain, many of them employed by the Metropolitan Police.

Most of the women had been taken on during the War to replace their male counterparts, who had been sent to fight in France. Nationally, the number of women police constables took a downturn from 1919 onwards, and for economic reasons Wiltshire considered it sufficient to appoint a female Welfare Worker instead of policewomen.

The first female police officer in Wiltshire was employed by Salisbury City Force in 1918. Miss Florence Mildred White, a former schoolmistress, was appointed at the age of 45!

Miss White was born at Warminster in December 1873. For eleven years she was the Senior Language Mistress at the Godolphin School in Salisbury, teaching French, German and Italian.

In 1917 she decided to leave teaching and join the police. She commenced training in Bristol and began service in Bath, moving back to Salisbury on 26th May 1918. Her career there lasted seven years, but regrettably there is little record of her activities in the City. Many senior local residents remember her walking the beat in her wide brimmed hat and smart blue uniform.

In May 1925 Miss White moved to Birmingham, where she served with distinction particularly as a detective. She became the 'Lady Enquiry Officer' and was later promoted to Inspector. In May 1936 Miss White was awarded a guinea for her action in a case of false pretences and abortion.

Miss White retired at the age of 63, in May 1937, after being awarded the King's Jubilee Medal. She died in Bournemouth in 1957.

Her successor at Salisbury was Miss Elsie Moulard, whose role was similar to Miss White's. It was described in a report from the Chief Constable of Salisbury City police to the Salisbury Watch Committee in 1931: 'In addition to the policewoman's ordinary police duties such as acting as matron to female prisoners, patrolling the streets and making enquiries concerning females and young persons etc., she has carried out a considerable amount of necessary, although unofficial welfare and rescue work.

'Amongst other items, she has found shelter for 23 stranded women and children; given help and advice in 115 cases of matrimonial differences, troublesome daughters, affiliation and wife maintenance questions etc., warning 21 girls regarding their conduct with men, where necessary also warned their parents and in six cases – where the girls were beyond parental control – arranged for their admission into Training Homes.'

Wiltshire Constabulary was slow in employing female police officers and there was a long period of delay before the first appointments were made. The matter was first raised in October 1920, but it was not until the onset of the Second World War that the matter became urgent. By 1939, the number of female police officers throughout the Country had risen to 230 – but of the 183 Forces, only 45 employed female police officers. Although Salisbury did, Wiltshire Constabulary did not.

With the call-up of regular officers into the armed forces it became apparent that the Police War Reserve alone could not cope with the huge increase in duties associated with the War.

In September 1940, it was finally decided to appoint female police officers in the Wiltshire Constabulary. Advertisements were immediately placed in national and local newspapers but, due to lack of suitable applicants, the first officer was not in post until mid 1942.

In April 1943 the approved establishment was increased to five as a result of the amalgamation of the County Constabulary with Salisbury City Force. The Force was supported, from 1942 onwards, by the Women Auxiliary Police Corps. Eighty-six women were employed as car drivers or on administrative duties – but they were not police officers as such.

In 1949 the authorised establishment of policewomen was increased again – to a Sergeant and nine constables. The post of Sergeant was not filled until 1953 when Woman Police Sergeant Horton was promoted at Salisbury.

By the early 1950s policewomen, although operating as a specialised department were being recognised as police officers in their own right. Standards of training had been improved and female officers in some Forces were attending Detective Training Courses.

Chief Constable Golden outlined his views on the role of policewomen during a speech to a regional conference of policewomen in Salisbury in 1953. He indicated the shift in emphasis from pre-war days. Now policewomen were concerned with a positive commitment to the prevention and detection of crime.

He told the conference that policewomen should make a point of visiting functions where large numbers of the general public would be found, such as fairs and race meetings. In this way, he said, crime could not only be detected, but also prevented. They should 'show the flag' to let the public know that there were policewomen – and give the public an opportunity to meet them.

But a policewoman's role was not just dealing with crime. A good policewoman, he said, could do a vast amount of good that would never appear in any record. She should get to know the women and children in her area and help them in their 'daily trouble'.

The Chief Constable added that policewomen should attend some of the Saturday morning film shows, not only to let the children know that there were policewomen who could help them – but to try and assess the effect which these films had upon children.

In 1977 the role of policewomen changed dramatically – with the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act. From 2nd January 1977, policewomen were assigned to duties which would 'provide opportunity for them to be involved in a wider sphere of police operations.' Assistant Chief Constable Harry Hull issued a memorandum that stated: 'As far as practicable women should be allocated the same tasks as male officers.'

By the late 1980s there were around 90 female police officers in Wiltshire. This was around 10% of the Force establishment. Two of Wiltshire's Inspectors were women and five women held the rank of Sergeant. Training, rates of pay and conditions of service were all equalized in the 1980s and 1990s.

The number of female police officers steadily increased and, at the time of writing, nearly 22.9% of Wiltshire officers are women. Among special constables, the proportion of women is even higher. Currently, more than a third of special constables (37.7%) are female. Of the police staff, 62.3% are women.

At the end of 2003, the combined strength of Wiltshire Constabulary, including all civilian police staff and police officers exceeded 2,120 people, of whom 834 are female (39.4%) and 1,286 are male (60.6%).



**WPC Sarah Ennis pictured in 2000 during the 'Beating of the Retreat' ceremony when she was a special constable. WPC Ennis is now based in Swindon as part of the North Sector.**

## A CITY FORCE

For many years the City of Salisbury had its own police force – entirely separate from the rest of Wiltshire Constabulary.

The Salisbury Division of Wiltshire Constabulary included the parishes around Salisbury. For the purpose of this history, we have included many achievements of the City Force as part of the overall story of Wiltshire Constabulary.

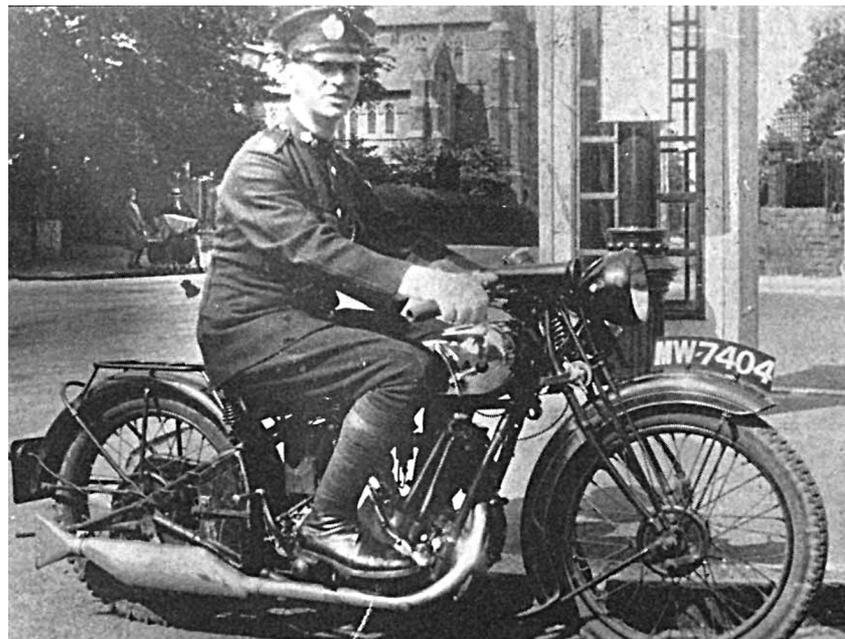
Nevertheless, it is important to record the basic details about Salisbury City police. The roots of the City Police can be traced back to the 1700s and the formation of a local militia force, often referred to as Brodie's Volunteers, who were instructed to keep watch and ward over the City.

On 8th January 1836 Salisbury Watch Committee decided to disband the thirteen existing sub constables and exercise its powers, under the Municipal Corporations Act 1835, to form a modern police force.

The Force was to consist of one 'Superintending High Constable', one 'High Constable', four 'Day Constables' and ten 'Night Constables'. The City was one mile 330 yards in length and 1500 yards in breadth. Six beats were formed.

**Twenty one year old PC Leslie Clark, of Salisbury City police, with his police motorbike at London Road, Salisbury, in the summer of 1926. In the background are a telephone kiosk and a police box.**

*Picture supplied by Irene Clark, Hale.*



On a Wednesday in May 1836 a decision was taken to dress the Force in a blue uniform, with the letters NSP (New Sarum Police) on one side of the collar and the constable's number on the other side. A month later, however, it was decided that the arms of the borough should be embroidered on the coat collars.

In September a decision was taken to clothe the men in uniforms similar to those worn by other Forces. This was a blue frock coat with white trousers and a top hat. The words 'Sarum Police' on white canvas were sewn onto the hat.

From May 1836, the Council Chamber was Salisbury's police office. Later a police station was established in Endless Street. Another police station was established on the corner of Endless Street and Salt Lane. The Chief Constable's house was down a narrow passageway behind what later became the Fire Station in Salt Lane. During the Second World War a police station was also set up at the Methodist Church in St Edmunds Church Street.

It is hard to imagine our town and City streets before the emergence of gas and electric lighting. Criminals could lurk undetected in the shadows, ready to strike at unwary pedestrians as they stumbled slowly home. In March 1836 the lighting of part of the Parish of Fisherton was debated and it was noted that there had been a large number of robberies in the area. It was not considered necessary, a few months later, to light The Close.

The New Sarum Police was disbanded and reorganised into the Salisbury City Police in April 1838. Mr John Bunter, a constable in the New Sarum Police, was elected Superintending Constable at a salary of £40 per annum. Four day constables and ten night constables were also appointed.

Joseph Cooper, who had been the first Police Superintendent at Bath, was appointed Salisbury's first Superintendent of Police in September 1839. He laid down rules for the appointment of constables. They were not to exceed 35 years of age, must be able to read and write, and willing to devote the whole of their time to duty. In return, they would be paid the generous sum of 15 shillings a week (75p).

The Force was reduced in size the following year to one Superintendent, two Sergeants and eight constables. Thomas Blake was appointed as an Inspector.

1840 proved to be a difficult year for the Force. The Superintendent was charged with misappropriating the wages of Force members and spending the money on drink. He was found drunk and disorderly and was given two options: to resign or be dismissed. He chose the former, and Inspector Blake was appointed Superintending Inspector in his place.

The records are incomplete, but it is known that Mr Frank Richardson was appointed as Chief Constable in November 1903. He is featured a number of times in photographs of the period. Frank Richardson's successor, in 1929, was R F Nixon – after whom one of the current Salisbury Police buildings in Wilton Road is named.

The Second World War brought with it the rationalisation of police forces. A decision was taken to amalgamate Wiltshire Constabulary and the Salisbury Force. This was meant to be a temporary measure – just for the duration of the War – but it proved to be permanent. The official amalgamation took place on 1st April 1943. Chief Constable Nixon became Wiltshire's Assistant Chief Constable, and Salisbury City Police ceased to exist.



**PC Alfred Churchill displays his brand new uniform after joining Salisbury City police in 1921. He lived in Cornwall Road, Salisbury, and enrolled at the police station at 26 Endless Street. Alfred Churchill served the Force until 1947, being Coroner's Officer for several years. Within ten days of joining, he suffered his first injury – at the hands of some London race-goers who had refused to pay their rail fares. He and Detective Jefferies were bundled into a car and then hurled out as the car sped past Salisbury General Infirmary. Both men were admitted to hospital.**

## CID



**The Operations room at Swindon Police Headquarters, Fleming Way, in the 1970s. This was the nerve centre for the nationwide drugs investigation, Operation Julie.**

*Picture supplied by Wiltshire Constabulary.*

From the early years of the Force plain clothes officers have been needed for the gathering of intelligence, maintaining discreet observation on buildings and on criminals and the investigation of crime.

The need for detectives was first expressed on 30th June 1857, when the Magistrates Committee ordered that three of the most intelligent constables should be appointed detective officers with the pay of an Inspector. They were permitted to wear plain clothes. Becoming a detective would have been a considerable promotion for the men selected. Regrettably, however, history does not record the names of Wiltshire's first detectives or the cases on which they were employed.

By 1932 little had changed, and three constables were still employed as detectives. The men worked in the divisions; at least two were probably stationed at Swindon. The town was, by now, a major industrial centre with policing problems to match.

By 1936 the detective strength had been increased to one Detective Sergeant and four Detective Constables who were operating in the divisions. There were still no detectives based at Police Headquarters in Bath Road, Devizes, and on occasions when the detective strength was low uniformed men were put into plain clothes temporarily. This often arose when race meetings were held at Salisbury.

In 1938, the Home Office received the report of a Committee on Detective Work and Procedure. The report brought about the most radical change in this field of police work and led to the establishment of Criminal Investigation Departments. In Wiltshire, Superintendents were instructed that the suitability of every constable as a potential detective was to be reported on at the end of their probationary period.

In 1939 a Detective Inspector was appointed as officer in charge of CID and to act as an Informations (Intelligence) Officer at Force Headquarters. A Detective Sergeant was appointed to take charge of the newly established Photographic, Printing and Fingerprinting Department.

A divisional Austin saloon car, which had been due for disposal, was retained and allocated for use by the new department. It was used to enable the scenes of crimes to be visited for expert examination and the recording of fingerprints, footprints and other marks. Articles and objects of interest to the CID were no longer sent to the Metropolitan Police for examination.



**A Scenes of Crime Officer now known as Crime Scene Investigator (DC Dave Creswell) 'dusts' for fingerprints on a suspect Ford Corsair in the early 1970s.**

*Picture supplied by Salisbury Divisional Police Headquarters.*



**A technician reviews CCTV video footage at the video unit at Police Headquarters in 2001.**  
*Photograph by Cathryn Martin.*

Recording of crimes was standardised throughout the Country. The Home Office could now draw meaningful conclusions from criminal statistics provided from around the Country.

Up until 1939 the percentage of crimes that were detected was so high as to be beyond belief. Clearly many of the crimes being committed were either not being reported or were being recorded on a selective basis. For instance the percentage of detected crime in the Marlborough Division for the second half of 1908 was over 98%!

The outbreak of the Second World War prevented the Criminal Investigation Department from developing along the lines recommended by the Home Office and although the overall strength was increased by the appointment of a number of temporary Detective Sergeants and constables, their time was mainly taken up with enquiries regarding aliens, persons to be detained, suspected enemy agents and other matters associated with the general state of emergency.

In 1946, after the War, the strength of the County CID was one Inspector, six Sergeants and 11 constables. A Detective Chief Inspector was appointed that year to take charge of the County CID and, from this time, the department was developed by the addition of personnel, including specialist officers, into the highly trained and well equipped department.

In 1989, CID was commanded by a Detective Chief Superintendent and consisted of three Detective Superintendents, four Detective Chief Inspectors, nine Detective Inspectors, 33 Detective Sergeants and 112 Detectives, including attached personnel.

At the time of writing (2003), CID was headed by a Detective Chief Superintendent based at Headquarters with 170 detectives based across the County.



**A fingerprint expert compares fingerprint marks on the Automated Fingerprint Recognition system (AFR) system in 1999.**



**Crime Scene Investigator Phillip Webster examines an exhibit from a crime scene prior to treating the item for fingerprints in the ninhydrin cabinet.**

## THE SUTTON VENY CAMP MURDER

One of the earliest uses of an experiment in ballistics in the detection of a crime took place in Wiltshire in 1917 – after a murder was discovered at Sutton Veny Camp.

In 1917 Britain was in the last painful throes of the First World War. Salisbury Plain was, for hundreds of thousands of doomed men, their last home on English soil.

The Plain was then, as it is now, a huge training area. Hutted and canvas encampments were situated all around. From dawn till dusk the thunder of horses' hooves, rattle of machine gun fire and rumble of artillery could be heard.

Thousands of miles from home, for thirty-one-year old Australian Verney Asser, the War consisted of training young Australians to use the Lewis machine gun at the Sutton Veny firing range.

Asser shared a hut with another Australian, Corporal Durkin, also a Lewis Gun Instructor. Durkin and Asser were competing for the affections of a young widow. Durkin was the luckier of the two and, despite an engagement to an Australian girl, he began to see the widow on a regular basis.

Towards the end of November 1917 he wrote to ask her to visit the camp on the 28th. The night before she was due to arrive, both men finished duty early and visited the canteen. Both appeared to be in good spirits. The two returned to their hut at about 9pm.

During the evening, no doubt, Corporal Durkin informed Asser that he was expecting to see the woman on the following day. At 9.30pm Asser called at the musketry store almost next door to his hut, and told Corporal Milne, who was in charge, that he wanted some empty magazines. He was allowed to help himself.

Five minutes later, as Corporal Milne was preparing to go to bed, he heard a shot from Asser's hut – a bullet came smashing through the wall, passing through a tunic and a haversack, before exiting through the other wall on the far side of the hut.

Milne, believing the shot to be an accident, thought nothing more of it. He undressed and went to bed. Forty minutes later Asser was again at the musketry store. He rummaged around for a minute or so and left once more. When questioned afterwards Corporal Milne did not know what Asser had taken.

Ten minutes later the Corporal heard another shot from the same direction and, at just after 11pm, Asser turned up with the Sergeant of the Guard to say that Durkin had shot himself.

The body was found undressed and covered by bedclothes. Durkin's body was lying on its right side, with the arms outstretched and a rifle lying across the wrists. There was a bullet wound on the left cheek and an exit wound on the opposite side of the head, just below the ear.

Asser claimed that he had been woken by the shot at 10.45pm. Jumping out of bed, and by the light of a match, he saw that Durkin had shot himself. Before he had alerted the Sergeant, Asser claimed that he had snatched the rifle away, ejected the cartridge and replaced the rifle in the position in which it had been found.

Asser's bed, however, was rolled up – so he couldn't have slept on it. When questioned further, Asser gave the unlikely explanation that he had slept on the floor!

Furthermore when Asser had alerted the Sergeant, he had been fully dressed and was wearing both his puttees and his boots. He denied all knowledge of the shot which had penetrated Corporal Milne's hut.

The facts were reported to the local police constable and, at the following day's inquest, Asser gave evidence that he believed Durkin had been depressed about his relationship with his fiancée and the young widow. The jury returned a verdict of suicide.

In the meantime Superintendent Scott visited the scene of the tragedy. After experimenting with the rifle, and hearing Corporal Milne's evidence, Scott concluded that Durkin had been murdered. The crime was reconstructed and it was proved beyond doubt that suicide was impossible. With the muzzle of the weapon pressed against the cheek, the trigger was too far for a man of Durkin's build to reach.

When the fatal wound was examined it was noted that there were no signs of singeing at the point where the bullet had entered the face. The shot must have been fired at some distance from the cheek rather than from directly against it.

In order to disprove the theory of suicide it was decided to conduct one of Wiltshire's first experiments in ballistics. The aim was to produce a wound that resembled the one causing Durkin's death.

A leg and shoulder of newly skinned mutton was chosen as a target. By firing at the mutton from varying distances, with the same rifle and similar bullets, it was discovered that a very similar wound could be produced from a range of five inches.

With Durkin's slight build and the muzzle of the rifle five inches away it would have been impossible for him to pull the trigger with his finger. Suicide could have been committed – but only if he had used his toe to pull the trigger, and then only if he had been uncovered.

Accordingly Asser was arrested on 3rd December and committed for trial at the Devizes Assizes on the 18th January 1918. The only problem for the prosecution was in establishing a motive for the murder. There was evidence of quarrels in the past, and that the two men had both visited the same woman – but there was no proof that there had been jealousy over her affections.

However, the jury's attention was drawn to the results of the experiments with the rifle, the significance of Asser's visit to the musketry store and the dress of the defendant at the time.

The judge also asked why Asser took the gun from the deceased and ejected the cartridge. The defendant replied that he didn't know. He also denied that he had visited the musketry store. This, said the judge in summing up, was a question of either accepting the defendant's word or the Corporal's. Asser also denied firing the shot that penetrated the Corporal's hut.

Asser was convicted of murder and leave to appeal on the grounds of insanity was refused. He was hanged. The Director of Public Prosecutions commended Superintendent Scott for his initiative.



Paul Sample, 43, is a Wiltshire-based journalist who was born and brought up in the County. He was educated in Wiltshire and at The City University, London. After graduation he became a Researcher in the Houses of Parliament and then trained to be a journalist 'on the job'.

He was asked to research and write the first edition of *The Oldest and The Best* in 1989, to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Wiltshire Constabulary.

In 1993 he became a member of Wiltshire Police Authority. He is now the longest-serving member of the Authority.

A former Mayor of Salisbury, Paul Sample now runs his own Public Relations company in the City. His hobbies include writing, golf, fly fishing, racing and flying.

Find out more about Wiltshire Police Authority at:  
[www.wiltshire-pa.gov.uk](http://www.wiltshire-pa.gov.uk)



## Wiltshire Constabulary

# THE OLDEST AND THE BEST



*The Oldest and The Best* is so much more than the history of an English County police force.

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- How a series of 'dynamite outrages' in the 1880s brought terror to the County.

Drawing on archives, diaries, newspaper accounts and personal testimonies, *The Oldest and The Best* traces the story of policing from the earliest times into the 21st Century.

Packed full of interesting facts, local stories and dozens of photographs, it is a fascinating chronicle of England's oldest County police force.

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