

History Matters



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Welcome to Issue 44 of 'History Matters – The Devon & Cornwall Police History Magazine'. This month we have a potted history on the South Devon Railway Police and a look at the obscure policing situation at Exeter's Bonhay Pleasure Ground in the 19th century.

As always, guest articles are welcome. If you have anything in mind for a future issue, please get in touch.

- **56658 Mark Rothwell**

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...and more...

Dedicated to Jane Kettell.

Front cover image: Police Constable number 10, Truro City Police, c1880. Truro had a small independent police force from 1836 to 1921. It was one of only a few forces in the southwest to use the striped duty armband. (*Simon Dell Collection*)

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Email: mark.rothwell3@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk

Tel: 07305545399

Social media: @TheRothOfKhan (X/Twitter)

SOUTH DEVON RAILWAY POLICE | 1848-1876

The *South Devon Railway Act 1844* authorised the construction of a railway between Exeter and Plymouth. It was to bridge the Bristol & Exeter Railway and the Cornwall Railway, and the body responsible for the undertaking would be known as the South Devon Railway Company. A clause in the Act of 1844 permitted the appointment of police constables on the company payroll for the detection and prevention of crime on the network, thus giving rise to the South Devon Railway Police.

The size and presentation of the South Devon Railway Police in the early years is difficult to describe. No company records appear to be in the public domain; either lost or destroyed following the company's take over by the GWR in 1876. We must instead look to sources such as *The British Newspaper Archive*, railway-related books, and *Ancestry.com*. The *Railway Shareholder's Manual (Ninth Edition)* describes the total staff of the railway company in 1848 as 197¹ persons however gives no jobs breakdown.

Another source is the *Police & Constabulary Almanac* (remember those?). The first of its kind was printed in 1844. However, as there was no legal requirement for railway companies to submit details to the publishers, we find no mention of the South Devon Railway Police until the 1866 edition. Quite unhelpfully, the strength of the force in the 1866 almanac is inclusive of the neighbouring Cornwall Railway Police; 95 constables between the two railway forces, with the chief constable of the South Devon Railway Police named as **Superintendent David Kerswell**.² Subsequent almanacs follow the same pattern until 1869 when we finally get a clear picture; 4 inspectors and 75 constables. Again, Superintendent Kerswell is at the head of the force (although the almanac records his forename as Daniel). Headquarters was located at Plymouth Railway Station.³

An 1848 report on the company expenditure makes one reference to 'police' funding, although it is unclear whether this refers to the constabulary or those employed as signalmen who were sometimes known as policemen. If the report is indeed referencing constables, then the cost to the company for the year was £1,848 18s 6d.⁴

William Thomas Baker was a company railway constable based at Newton Abbot. On 3rd April 1849, he resigned from the force to take charge of the new Newton Abbot Police Force. In 1857, when the Devon Constabulary assumed responsibility for policing Newton Abbot, Baker returned to the South Devon Railway Police. He did not remain in post long; in September of that year, he resigned and found employment at the Plympton & St Mary Union Workhouse.

In October 1849, several members of the force received notices of dismissal. Acting on information that many experienced policemen were about to be displaced, the chief constable of Northamptonshire Constabulary travelled to Newton Abbot, hastily inspected the men at the railway station, and snapped up twelve of them for his force. They commenced their training in Northamptonshire on 30th October 1849.⁵

The force was amalgamated with the Great Western Railway Police in 1876.

¹ *Railway Shareholder's Manual (Ninth Edition)*, p219

² 'Railway Police' *Police & Constabulary Almanac 1866*, p62

³ 'Railway Police' *Police & Constabulary Almanac 1869*, p72

⁴ *Address to the Proprietors of the South Devon Railway 1848*, p58

⁵ 'Northamptonshire Quarter Sessions' *Northampton Mercury* 5 January 1850, p2



BRADNINCH BOROUGH POLICE

c1605-1865

Front Elevation

Proposed Police Station at Bradninch
for

The Devon County Council.

The ancient borough of Bradninch, in East Devon, received its first charter of incorporation during the reign of King Henry II. The third charter, granted in the year 1605, empowered the mayor and burgesses of the borough to appoint two serjeants-at-mace, one head constable, and four “inferior constables”⁶, thus bringing the policing arrangements in Bradninch on par with larger conurbations such as Exeter and Plymouth.

Traditionally, the serjeants-at-mace tended the to the mayor, the guildhall, and the courtroom, but were constables in their own right and acted at common law when the need arose. It is unknown how soon Bradninch acted on its charter obligations, however in 1681 we find the borough being policed by the said mace serjeants and a handful of constables.

Bradninch had its own gaol. It was a deplorable place, quite common for 17th century prisons, and many prisoners died from disease whilst incarcerated. In 1666, the gaol and the guildhall were destroyed by fire. The replacement gaol was not much better than the one that preceded it. In 1764, the borough authorities inspected the building and decided it was “insecure, squalid, and downright dangerous”.

Minor improvements were made to the cells in 1774, however deaths from disease, usually caused by poor sanitation, still occurred.

Whilst the prison continued to fall into disrepair, the borough authorities were feathering their nests with public money. One extravagance was the construction of a cosy public house next to the guildhall, to which the men in power could adjourn and fill their bellies.

Richard Patch spent 15 weeks in Bradninch Gaol and emerged “borne down by disease”. In 1833, Patch gave evidence to a government commissioner who relayed his findings as such to a Royal Commission into boroughs:

“There was one day room, and two sleeping apartments; the only light and air admitted was through a grating in the door of the day room. There were no windows in the sleeping apartment; it was very cold. The privy was a hole dug in the corner of the day room. There was a dreadful stench. Had been there seven weeks before and he and his fellow prisoners could empty it. Then, after repeated complaints, the gaoler gave them some buckets; before this it was so full that the filth

⁶ ‘The Borough of Bradninch’ Exeter and Plymouth Gazette 26 October 1833, p3

*ran under the boards of the room and oozed up as they trod on them..."*⁷

On 18th July 1832, a fire which began in the bakehouse destroyed the gaol and around fifty houses. The following year, His Majesty's Commissioners arrived in Bradninch and inspected the state of affairs before the Mayor, George Pearse, and Peter Sharland, town clerk.

Sharland revealed that the policing arrangements in Bradninch were in accordance with ancient traditions. When asked as to their enumerations, he told the commissioners the police were paid "not a farthing". When asked about plans to rebuild the gaol, he advised them that funds had been taken from the poor rate, as authorised by the magistrates and churchwarden, for the purpose of rebuilding.⁸ Incidentally, construction on the new gaol was completed in 1835.

The commissioners discovered quite a rotten situation in Bradninch during their 1833 inspection. Almost the entire corporation was related to one another, with many appointments rendered possible by nepotism rather than by democracy. Court sessions were often abandoned in favour of hearty dinners at the local ale house, and the mayor (Henry Matthews), was elected "for life" and had the final say on such matters as refusing to renew liquor licences because he "wills it so". In 1859, it was remarked in the press that Mayor Matthews was a "...stout defender of the immunities of that ancient body".⁹

On 1st January 1836, the *Municipal Corporations Act 1835* came into effect and created 185 'municipal boroughs' in England and Wales. Each borough was required to form a police watch committee and assemble a paid constabulary as soon as possible. Bradninch was not included in the Act of 1835 and

continued to appoint its policemen under its own terms.

County magistrates had no jurisdiction in Bradninch. Justice was instead dispensed by the mayor who tried prisoners for murder, treason, felonies, and petty larcenies at quarterly court sessions. The town clerk was responsible for assembling lists of jurymen from the inhabitants, and the mayor had the final say on who would be called upon. The mayor also presided over a civil court for the recovery of debt, however it was infrequently used and heard only four cases between 1815 and 1833. Indeed, between 1829 and 1833, no cases at all had been tried at the *criminal* court. Following the 1833 inspection, several men who weren't blood relatives were appointed as members of the corporation in a bid to appease. Despite the apparent protectionism displayed by the Bradninch authorities, legal etiquette was still observed; if an offender was apprehended in Bradninch for a crime that happened 'out of force', the prisoner was sent for trial to the court with the relevant magisterial jurisdiction.

The *County and Borough Police Act 1856*, which led to the formation of county constabularies in England and Wales, also contained a formal mechanism for inspection. In 1857, a HMIC inspector (Captain Willis) arrived in Bradninch. His report said thusly:

"In Bradninch one constable is appointed for duty, and he holds the appointment of governor of the borough gaol. The constable is not provided with any clothing or furnished with books, and he performs his duty in such manner as he deems desirable, and without supervision... It has been suggested to the mayor and corporation to appoint two properly

⁷ 'The Borough of Bradninch' Western Times 26 October 1833, p3

⁸ 'Corporation of Bradninch' Western Times 13 July 1833, p4

⁹ 'Bradninch' Western Times 27 August 1859, p6

constituted constables for the protection of the borough.”¹⁰

The Bradninch head constable in 1853 was **Richard Haydon** who was a baker by trade. In 1854, a criminal case was brought against Head Constable Haydon by William Manley, a butcher. It was alleged that Manley was violently accosted in the street by Haydon who had gone to speak to him about an allegation of forgery. Haydon grabbed Manley by the collar, called him an “infernally rogue” and then struck him several times with his fist. He then pushed Manley, and Manley’s wife, through the threshold of Manley’s house. Haydon was summoned to Tiverton County Court on 12th October 1854 to answer a case for assault. He admitted assaulting and insulting Manley, however his conduct was disputed by several witnesses, one of whom was the mayor, who believed that Haydon acted well within his powers. Furthermore, it was noted in the hearing that Haydon’s conduct and powers, as derived from common law, were incomparable to those of the police in towns where Acts of Parliament applied.¹¹

The Devon Constabulary, established by Act of Parliament in 1857, was quite entitled to assume policing responsibilities over the town. However, this required the stubborn Bradninch authorities to agree a local rate to sustain any county constables. They refused, and the situation dragged on for eight years. In the meantime, Constable Haydon continued to serve as Head Constable.

In 1859, an attempt was made to force Bradninch to accept county administration for policing purposes, but the corporation resisted, and succeeded. The mayor, aldermen, and other corporation members toasted to their

victory at a dinner held at the Castle Inn, Bradninch, on 24th August of that year.¹²

Haydon was succeeded by **Robert Swaine** in 1864. In 1865, Devon’s chief constable, **Gerald de Courcy Hamilton**, revisited the Bradninch issue after taking significant legal advice. His solution was to take Bradninch by force. He did so by sending county police **Superintendent Richard G. Collins** (‘C’ Division – Cullompton) to the town and ordered him to occupy Head Constable Swaine’s office. The borough police house, which was owned by Bradninch corporation, was also taken over and the Devon Constabulary arranged to pay rent on it. Quite how Swaine reacted to this is unknown.

Another significant alteration made by the arrival of the Devon Constabulary was an end to the use of Bradninch Gaol as a place of detention. From that point forward, prisoners were instead conveyed to Exeter.

The *Police & Constabulary Almanac* for the year 1866 shows Bradninch firmly under the control of the Devon Constabulary ‘C’ Division and no longer an independent force.¹³ Although Bradninch Corporation had lost control of its police, the corporation itself persisted. Governance according to ancient traditions continued until Lady Day 1886, when the corporation was forcibly abolished according to the requirements of the *Municipal Corporations Act 1883*.

The image in the article header on page 3 (courtesy of Bradninch Town Council) shows plans submitted to Devon County Council for a police station in 1893.

¹⁰ Inspector of Constabulary Annual Report 1857

¹¹ ‘Tiverton County Court’ Western Times 21 October 1854, p10

¹² ‘Bradninch – The Henry Matthews Testimonial’ Western Times 27 August 1859, p6

¹³ ‘Devonshire’ Police & Constabulary Almanac 1866, p26



TECALEMIT SECURITY POLICE

'PROPER COPPERS' OR SECURITY GUARDS?



THE 60 ACRE PANORAMIC TECALEMIT FACTORY, PLYMOUTH, DEVON

Under this one roof are all manufacturing facilities, including heavy fabrication, research and development, plastics extrusion, electroplating, chemical laboratories. Tecalemit's Automatic Machine and Capstan Bays are among the largest in the Country.

Historical discoveries are sometimes made in the strangest of ways. Early in 2022, a seemingly ordinary trip to a local recycling centre took an unusual turn. Whilst depositing armfuls of waste into the relevant bins, something amongst the already-dumped rubbish warranted further investigation. A tatty piece of A4 paper, of photocopier quality, depicting a group photo of a smartly dressed bunch of men beneath the words 'TECALEMIT SECURITY POLICE', and dated 1953. The finder thankfully had the foresight to rescue the item from the tip and it found its way to the editor. Naturally this prompted some investigation!

What is 'Tecalemit'?

Tecalemit, a portmanteau of the brand names 'Techa' and 'Alemit', was established as a company in Paris in 1922 by Emile Piquerez and Joseph Christe. As it does in the present day under the name 'Tecalemit Garage Equipment', the company made precision-engineered machines and machine parts for the automotive servicing industry.

The first British branch was established in London and consisted of four staff. In 1932, the company opened its 'Garage Equipment Training School' which provided tuition to its garage bay employees. The excellent reputation of Tecalemit was such that it

soon opened its doors to the three branches of the British armed forces. Further expansion saw it make inroads into the aircraft and marine sector, as well as general industry, where it provided lubrication applications.

During the Second World War, Tecalemit's factories were requisitioned for the war effort. Production was ramped up, and parts were supplied to the Admiralty and the Ministry of Aircraft Production. After the war, the booming civilian motor trade necessitated expansion, and a sixty-acre site at Marsh Mills, Plymouth, was selected as the company's new base of

operations. The site was formerly used by the Ministry of Labour as a training centre for building operatives. The first of three buildings was completed in 1948.

The Plymouth facility (depicted in the header image) was an exceptionally large operation with over 2,500 employees. Essentially its own community, there was a company social club, a large canteen, a regular newspaper, and even an exclusive nightclub called the 'Target Club' on Union Street. Technical staff were housed at nearby Leigham Manor which was purchased from Plymouth City Council.

So what of its 'police' force?

It was common for factories in the mid-20th century to appoint 'works police' to protect from theft. The country had already seen such initiatives during the Great War; the women police who looked after the morals of the 'Munitionettes' who built munitions for the war effort, being an example.

Where Tecalemit is concerned, it remains unclear whether the so-called 'Tecalemit Security Police' was a body of sworn constables or merely a group of security men.

Plymouth resident Mr Patrick Connolly remembers them:

"The police were a security team but regarded as officers on site and had full uniforms. If my father believed someone was stealing from his garage equipment division, he would inform the officers who would apprehend the culprit and search them. They were involved in traffic control at the start and end of shifts when fourteen buses would arrive to drop off or pick up the staff".



The photo that started it all. Note the sergeant's chevrons on the gentleman seated front and centre, and the ranks and collar numbers in the seating plan. (Image source unknown)

Historian Si Smith, a regular contributor to this magazine, postulates that the members of the Tecalemit Security Police at some time may have possessed full constabulary powers according to the provision of Section 1(1) of the *Emergency Laws (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1947*. The Act was one of many which extended emergency defence powers beyond the conclusion of the Second World War, and authorised companies that provided services to national security to appoint constables from the company staff. This aligns well with the situation at Tecalemit which provided services to the military in the 1940s and 50s. The Act was repealed by the *Emergency Laws (Repeals) Act 1959*, placing the existence of a fully sworn constabulary at Tecalemit between the years 1947 and 1959.

Bill Alderman, who started working for Tecalemit in 1965, is quoted in historian Chris Robinson's book (page 16):

"We'd have fun with the security boys. When we were on overtime they used to walk right through the workshop, and we'd whistle the theme to 'Z-Cars' all the way up and back in time with their walking."

Any recollections after 1959 give credence to the idea that these men kept up the visage of a fully sworn constabulary even though, by that time, they possessed no powers greater than the ordinary citizen at common law.

Penny Rolls, the Sales Operations and Performance Manager at the modern-day Tecalemit, says that, regrettably, company records do not go as far back as the 1940s or 50s.

Quite helpfully, the group photo overleaf has a seating plan which provides the following names:

PC 7. W.R. WARREN

PC 4 R.J.J. CURTIS

PC 5 C.L. CURTIS

PC 2 C. LANSLEY

PC 9 J.J. HOSKING

PC 10 W.A.R. EDWARDS

PC 8 S.A. FAULKES

Sergeant H.C. BURGESS

PC 3 A.W. SIMS

PC 6 C.T. WILSON

Working on the assumption that some of these men had previous constabulary experience before working at Tecalemit, historian Trevor Finbow was able cross-reference some of the names, with reasonable confidence, with those who served in the Plymouth City Police First Reserve during WW2. The source document is one held by the 'The Box' (formerly the Plymouth & West Devon Record Office).

PC Charles LANSLEY was ex-Plymouth City Police 1st Police Reserve. Home address 4 Ladysmith Road, Lipson, Plymouth.

PC Richard CURTIS was ex-Royal Marines Police at Devonport Docks.

PC 8 S.A. (or F.A.) FAULKES also served in the police reserve. He lived at 39 Broad Park Road, Peverell.

Sergeant H.C. BURGESS was likely Harry Charles Burgess who served in Plymouth City Police during the Second World War.¹⁴

Tecalemit was acquired by Siebe PLC in 1982 and is still going strong in the present day, with "...a worldwide reputation for supplying a comprehensive range of quality vehicle servicing and testing equipment for motorcycles, cars and commercial vehicles."

Despite the latter investigations, it remains undecided as to whether Tecalemit Security Police was a 'police force' in the traditional sense. Tecalemit was not unique in this respect; the Pressed Steel Co., Rolls Royce, and even the Holman Brothers factory in Camborne had men employed as 'works police'.

With thanks to the following individuals for their assistance with this research:

Simon Dell MBE QCB (Historian and Author)

Si Smith (Police History Society)

Trevor Finbow (Historian)

Penny Rolls (Tecalemit Garage Equipment)

Patrick Connolly

Jane Widecombe

Dr David Churchill (School of Law, University of Leeds)

Tony Moore (Police History Society)

John Riggs (Police History Society)

Barry Walsh (Police History Society)

Martin McKay (British Transport Police History Group)

...and to Chris Bailey for having the foresight to rescue the photo from the tip in the first place!

¹⁴ 1939 Register – Find My Past



BIDEFORD BOROUGH POLICE

1836-1889

Before the Borough Police

In May 1816, a food riot in Bideford made news in Parliament. The Home Secretary at the time, Lord Sidmouth, decided swift and immediate action was needed to apprehend the offenders and arranged for the dispatch of a senior 'Bow Street Runner' called Stafford. By August, Stafford had arrested five men, including the ringleader, and condemned them to prison sentences ranging from six months to two years.

A Police Force is Established

Towns like Bideford could not rely on the reactive services of men from London. The parish constables, ordinary men elected once per year at Easter, were often unenthusiastic and ineffective. Thus, come the passing of the *Municipal Corporations Act 1835*, the authorities in Bideford were delighted to be empowered to employ the services of a paid policeman for the borough.

On 28th January 1836 (the first sitting of the newly appointed corporation), the business of forming a police force was discussed. An office, to be called the 'Police Office of the Borough' or 'Watch House', was to be established and was to occupy the space where the borough fire engines were kept beneath the guildhall at a cost of £55 to convert.¹⁵ Despite the proactivity of the borough council, it took several months for a policeman to be appointed.

¹⁵ Bideford Borough Council Minutes 28 January 1836

The First Chief Constable

On 29th July 1836, a letter was sent to the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Richard Mayne, enquiring as to the services of a police officer for Bideford. A response from Commissioner Mayne was swiftly received:

*"Sir, the Commissioners of Police beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 1st instant and to acquaint you that they can recommend **Police Constable Elias Palmer** for the appointment in question at a salary of thirty shillings per week and lodgings to be provided for him..."*

Satisfied with Mayne's recommendation, Elias Palmer was directed to attend Bideford as soon as possible and his appointment as head constable was ratified on 22nd August, with the condition that he be provided with a lantern and staff at a cost of 14 shillings. His salary was approved as per Mayne's suggestion and ten pounds per year was allocated for lodgings. Moreover, the corporation graciously decided to pay for Palmer's travel expenses from London to Bideford.¹⁶ Joining him was his wife Elizabeth and their young daughter Catherine and they lived together in the police lodgings on Meddon Street.

Palmer was an active and enthusiastic police officer and went about his duties with zeal. His activities were popularly reported on in the press, notably the *North*

¹⁶ Bideford Borough Council Minutes 22 August 1836

Devon Journal which covered all manner of escapades including the arrest of drunks, thieves, hawkers, and vagrants.

Palmer was the only paid constable in the borough, although was occasionally assisted by unpaid parish constables. Another source of assistance came from the Bideford Association for the Protection of Property, a private insurance company. By 1844, Palmer had been so successful in stamping out the borough's nuisances that there was sometimes very little for him to do. This prompted the council to review his salary, and from November of that year his wages went from £78 per year to £55.

This seems to have taken the wind out of Palmer's sails and over the next couple of years he appears to have become quite disillusioned with the Bideford authorities. On Regatta Day 1846, Palmer's wife was violently assaulted on the Quay by a man named John Johnson. The case was dismissed by the magistrates as an instance of 'happy drunkenness' on the offender's part. Later, councillor Arthur Ley accused Head Constable Palmer of acting outside of his authority by refusing bail to a prisoner without consulting the magistrates. Historian Peter Christie, writing for the *Devonshire Association* in 1986, speculated that the prisoner in question was Johnson and that Palmer was doing his best to make things difficult for him.

On 4th September 1846, Palmer's services were dispensed with, and he was replaced by ex-soldier **Dennis Sullivan**. Not long after Palmer's departure, discrepancies were found in the borough gas fund, which Palmer was deputised to collect as one of many extraneous duties. It appears that Palmer was pocketing coin and by the time the embezzlement was discovered, Palmer had left the country altogether and appears never to have set foot in Bideford again.

The Sullivan Era

There is often a belief that 19th century policemen were not forensically minded. Far from it. In February 1850, Head Constable Sullivan was engaged in an arson investigation on land at Kenwith Farm in the parish of Northam. Footprints were discovered at the scene where many hundreds of pounds worth of unthreshed wheat had been destroyed by fire. Acting on information provided by the parish constable of

Abbotsham, Sullivan proceeded to the home of 55-year-old Edward Smith. Sullivan examined Smith's shoes, which were drying near an open fire, and found the nails and toe plates to match the impressions found at the crime scene. He also remarked "...there was not such a long foot in the parish".¹⁷¹⁸

In February 1847, Sullivan oversaw the rescue effort of several passengers from the Bideford Omnibus which careered out of control and plummeted into the water at Bideford Quay. Many hours were spent hauling the carriage to dry land with grappling irons, after which the terrible task of retrieving the bodies of eight men, women, and children who had drowned in the catastrophe was undertaken. As the bodies were removed one-by-one, an onlooker's morbid fascination, influenced in part by drink, led to him falling from the quay to his death.

Revolving Door of Chief Constables

James Tyrell succeeded Dennis Sullivan as chief of police in 1853. Tyrell was given additional powers in February 1854, along with **Police Constable William Vanstone**, to inspect nuisances at the borough's common lodging houses. Tyrell departed c1856 and was replaced by **Robert Chipman** who in turn was replaced by **Robert William Gifford** the following year. Gifford had previously served as the chief constable of Devonport Borough Police. Gifford left in 1858 to take up the chief constableness of Cardiff Police. Policeman Vanstone, who had served under Tyrell, Chipman, and Gifford, was elevated into the top police office at Bideford upon Gifford's departure.

Vanstone was known for his kindly nature and the respect with which he treated even those who deserved the public's contempt. In 1864, his kindness was exploited by a man he was sent to arrest for falling into arrears in relation to a filiation order. The man, named Norton, asked whether he could first his supper before being taken into custody, which Vanstone approved of. After finishing his meal, he asked whether he could wash his face which, again, Vanstone thought a perfectly reasonable request. Unfortunately, Norton had no intention of submitting to the law and fled via the back door. Superintendent Vanstone was known to detest foul language, and whenever the need arose to express high emotion, he would exclaim instead such moderate curses as "Dang the fellow!"

¹⁷ 'Town Council Meeting' North Devon Gazette 18 March 1862, p4

¹⁸ 'Devon and Exeter Lent Assizes' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette 27 March 1852, p3

In 1862, the Bideford force consisted of one superintendent, one sergeant, and eight constables. At a meeting of the town council held on 13th March of that year, it was noted that, for reasons unknown, one of the constables was earning an extra shilling a week more than the others. At the same meeting, the minutiae of the cost of furnishing Superintendent Vanstone with a new suit of uniform was discussed quite pedantically. It seems the town council were unwilling to go all out for Vanstone when men such as the town crier wore far more affordable clothing!

Vanstone was succeeded in the 1870s by a **Superintendent Cole**. Cole resigned in 1877 and took office with Salford Police, leaving the Police Watch Committee to deliberate on the employment of five extra constables on top of the existing three. Cole was regarded as a man of good standing and received many tributes and well-wishes on his departure. It came as a shock to all when news reached Bideford of Cole's dismissal and imprisonment for embezzlement in 1879. His successor was one of the former chief constables, **Robert Chipman**, who served out his second term until around 1884 when he was succeeded by **David Morgan**, formerly a police inspector at Swansea Borough Police.

Under the superintendence of David Morgan, the size and reputation of the force improved significantly, and the police of the borough were the envy of the region. During an 1884 sitting of the petty sessions court in Bideford, a complaint was read from the residents of the parishes of Abbotsham, Appledore, and Northam, which jurisdictions of the Devon Constabulary, that the high efficiency of the borough police tended to force certain miscreants over the border into their parishes. Being served only by a handful of county policemen, the three parishes suffered greatly.

Amalgamation

The force's fate was sealed in 1889 when the terms of the *Local Government Act 1888* removed the right of Bideford Borough Police to exist (as the population of the town fell below the required 10,000 to maintain a municipal police force). The incumbent superintendent, David Morgan, was offered a job with the Devon Constabulary which he accepted, on the condition he suffered no pecuniary disadvantage. It was Morgan's intention to remain in Bideford, however, at the request of the chief constable of the

Devon Constabulary, he was relocated to Honiton in the rank of inspector on a superintendent's pay. He departed Bideford in May 1889.

Morgan later transferred to Totnes where, as with his previous appointments, he enjoyed the respect of his colleagues and the public. Towards the end of 1893, Morgan contracted tuberculosis. He continued to work, however on 29th December he could no longer perform adequately. He died in his lodgings at Totnes Police Station on 1st January 1894.



Bideford Borough Police tunic button. (Simon Dell Collection)

Bideford Market Police c1835-c1870

It was within the gift of Bideford Town Council to appoint constables for the sole purpose of policing the market. The decision was that of the council's Market Committee which decided in 1835 to appoint the two market superintendents as constables. They worked once a week on Tuesdays, later two days a week when Saturday markets began.

One of market constables was a man named **William Gilbert** who served for almost 40 years. The *North Devon Gazette* reported in May 1857 the dastardly theft of a "pot'n pudding"¹⁹ from the market stall of a Mrs Harris. Gilbert located the culprit, a man named William Fhiletus Watts, and threw him in the town lockup to await his turn at the next petty sessions court!

By 1862, the office of market constable came in lieu of whomever was appointed as governor of the borough gaol. By 1865, however, Gilbert had lost his position at the gaol but continued to act as market constable until at least 1870.

¹⁹ 'Bideford' *North Devon Gazette* 19 May 1857, p4



BONHAY PLEASURE GROUND CONSTABLES c1871-c1898

A site for public recreation adjacent to Exeter's River Exe, upstream of the Exe Bridge, was established in the early 1850s. The general maintenance of the grounds was the responsibility of the city's Public Grounds Committee, and a park keeper was appointed for this purpose. The late, great, Exeter historian David Cornforth said of the pleasure ground:

"The movement to provide parks and pleasure grounds for the populace in the late 19th century led to the opening of the Bonhay Pleasure Ground, on the Exe bank, adjacent to the cattle market. Here, a scrap of open green park was provided for the enjoyment of the residents of Exe Island".²⁰

The aforementioned Exe Island was a site of industrial development. In the 1860s and 70s, Exe Island was quite the noxious offender; the pungent effluence emitted by the *Gas Ammoniacal Liquor Distillery and Manure Factory* was enough to make one retch. Moreover, during very heavy rain, the drains would overflow with bloody water from the nearby abattoir on Bonhay Road. This would flow into the leats to the south and north of the pleasure ground, and it is a wonder whether the city regretted situating the pleasure ground where they did.

²⁰ 'Bonhay Road' Exeter Memories, David Cornforth, 30 May 2018

In the summer of 1871, groundskeeper **Henry Connor** (sometimes *Conner* or *Connett* in the press) complained to the Exeter Police Watch Committee of the disgusting behaviour of drunken men in the pleasure ground on Sunday afternoons. It was suggested that a city constable should be placed there during the times of most complaint. It seems that the committee instead decided to appoint Connor himself as a special constable, likely to ensure he was protected in the execution of duty and to enforce the byelaws more robustly.

Connor was previously a sergeant in the 10th Regiment of Foot. He lived on the grounds in a small park lodge with his wife and spent many years both performing horticultural duties and the normal business of a policeman. On 31st January 1882, Connor fell ill quite suddenly and died in the lodge. It was said that he had suffered from heart palpitations for some weeks previous. A surgeon was sent for by another police constable, but nothing could be done for him. An inquest found he had died from natural causes, probably heart disease.²¹

Peter Lisson Blanchard, another former military man, was appointed in Connor's place.²² He was previously a colour sergeant in the First Devon Militia and served in India, China, and Gibraltar. Like his predecessor, he lived in the park lodge. He kept poultry on the premises, and in the summer of 1884 one of his hens made local news when it laid a four-ounce egg some 8 ¾ inches long!²³ In May 1885, Blanchard suffered the death of his adult son, John, who was struck by a train at Templecombe. He was a porter in the London & South Western Railway Company.²⁴ History repeats itself - Blanchard died suddenly in the lodge in February 1888. His widow continued to live in the lodge and was paid ten shillings per week until a new keeper could be appointed. The new keeper was **Henry Oke**, formerly the groundskeeper at Bury Meadow Pleasure Ground.²⁵ Yet another military man, he had served in the Crimean War. He too was sworn as a special constable not long after his appointment.

The pleasure grounds' proximity to the River Exe presented a constant risk of misadventure, particularly as the riverside was not fenced off. As such, the pleasure ground constable sometimes had to snap into action to save life and limb. One such occasion happened on 13th July 1886 when, at around 5pm, a child called Bastin fell into the water. Constable Oke launched himself into the water, pulled the child to safety, and took him home to his parents.²⁶ He leapt into action again in 1888 to save the life of Mary Knight who had thrown herself into the water. Oke, listed as "PC Henry Oke" in the court register, later appeared as a witness for when Miss Knight was prosecuted for the offence.²⁷ Oke tendered his resignation in 1898, citing ill health. He had been a public servant for 25 years.²⁸ Following his resignation, the park keeper's duties were temporarily assumed by the city surveyor. Oke died on 6th April 1903 at the age of 71.²⁹ If the local newspapers are anything to go by, the departure of Constable Oke seems to have heralded the end of the practice of swearing in the groundskeepers as constables. In 1930, part of the pleasure ground was taken to satisfy the city council's plan to expand the nearby cattle market. In the present day, the lodge is gone but the ground is still a place of public recreation under the care and control of Exeter City Council and the policing remit of Devon & Cornwall Police.

²¹ 'Sudden Death' Western Times Friday 3 February 1882, p2

²² 'Northernhay and Public Grounds Committee' Express and Echo Wednesday 22 March 1882, p4

²³ 'An Extraordinary Layer' North Devon Journal - Thursday 28 August 1884

²⁴ 'Local News' Western Times Saturday 16 May 1885, p3

²⁵ 'Bury Meadow and Bonhay Grounds' Western Times Thursday 23 February 1888, p3

²⁶ 'Local and District News' Exeter Flying Post - Monday 15 July 1889

²⁷ Henry Oke - Devon Social & Institutional Records – Devon Heritage Centre – Reference 'ECA'

²⁸ Exeter Flying Post Saturday 18 June 1898, p5

²⁹ 'Births, Marriages, and Deaths' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette Thursday 9 April 1903, p11

THE THEATRE ROYAL CONSTABLES | 1833



(David Cornforth Collection)

On 17th January 1833, a warning to playgoers of Exeter's Theatre Royal appeared in the *Exeter Flying Post*:

*“Repeated complaints having been made of the annoyance received from persons misconducting themselves in the theatre, the public is respectfully informed that constables will in future be placed there for the purpose of immediately taking into custody anyone insulting the audience by using improper language, making unnecessary noise, throwing missiles into the pit, etc., and such person or persons will be prosecuted with the utmost vigour of the law!”*³⁰

Edward Cock and **Joseph Walter Prowse** were subsequently sworn as constables for the sole purpose of policing the patrons and to, “...deal with all the persons guilty of disturbance and riotous conduct at places of public amusement according to the law...”. The constables were to, “...take into custody such individuals as persisted in disturbing the audience and the performers by indecent or riotous conduct...”³¹

Their presence seemed to have an impact, for on 20th February George Andrews and John Ash were hauled before the Exeter magistrates for, “...riotous and indecent behaviour in the gallery of the theatre...” They were each fined five shillings and bound over in the sum of £10 to keep the peace.³²

On 4th May 1833, it was reported in the press that Constable Prowse had been recently called upon to deal with a disturbance in the theatre during the course of a performance. It seems that the instigator of the problem was none other than Inspector Lavercombe of the City Watch! Lavercombe, arriving late to the show, attempted to squeeze himself into the middle of the gallery, thereby haphazardly knocking off the bonnets of some of the lady patrons. This caused a ruckus and drew threats from some of the men who called upon Constable Prowse to come and eject him. In the midst of doing so, Prowse was struck by a man named Skinner. Another city watchman, Inspector Ofield, also involved himself unnecessarily.

Both inspectors and two other men were subsequently called before the magistrates to explain themselves. Inspector Ofield complained to the magistrates that, “...Prowse had exceeded his duty and was far more officious than the case required”.³³

³⁰ ‘Theatre Royal Exeter’ *Exeter Flying Post* 17 January 1833, p2

³¹ ‘Theatre’ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* Saturday 2 March 1833, p2

³² ‘Caution’ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 23 February 1833, p2

³³ ‘Row at the Theatre’ *Western Times* 4 May 1833, p4

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

REFUSING TO SERVE AS A SPECIAL CONSTABLE

On 13th November 1848, Mr William Bryant was called before the magistrates at Exeter Guildhall to answer a charge of refusing to serve as a special constable. He was fined £2 (the minimum permitted for the offence). Bryant refused to pay, and a distress warrant was issued for recovery of goods to the value of the penalty.

Source: Royal Cornwall Gazette - Friday 17 November 1848

Serving in the special constabulary was a civic duty in the 19th century, rather than on a voluntary basis as is the case today. If called upon to serve, the Special Constables Act 1831 laid down that one must do so for no longer than three months. Refusal to serve was an offence, punishable by a maximum fine of £5. One could however lawfully refuse on health grounds.

What Became of the Dennis Arthur Smith Cup?



With thanks to Gary Cairns for investigating the fate of the Dennis Smith Rowing Cup. The cup was commissioned to honour the memory of **PC Dennis Arthur Smith QPM** (left) who was murdered on duty in 1973. It is currently in the care of Torquay Rowing Club.

Dawlish Coastguardsmen as Special Constables

The coastal town of Dawlish was once a popular receiver of goods smuggled by boat on the Exe River. Smuggling was a thriving illegal trade designed to dodge the payment of government fees on commodities such as brandy, sugar, tea, and coffee. Many on land were complicit, even some magistrates who looked the other way in return for cheap supplies. All that stood between the smugglers and their beneficiaries was the Coast Blockade Service, a predecessor to the modern Maritime & Coastguard Agency. On 2nd December 1830, the coastguardsmen at Dawlish were sworn in as special constables, "...ordered to be in constant readiness in the event their being required".³⁴

³⁴ 'Dawlish' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette 4 December 1830, p3

BARUM CROOK EATS THE EVIDENCE

On 28th July 1848, the following report appeared in the *West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser*.

SWALLOWING A FIVE POUND NOTE. – At the County Magistrates office, Barnstaple, on Wednesday, a man calling himself *John Richards* was committed for trial at the ensuing assizes at Exeter, charged with having broken and entered the dwelling house of the Rev. Richard John Beadon, at Sherwill, on Sunday afternoon last, and stolen therefrom a five pound Bank of England note and five sovereigns, the property of Henry Dinnicombe, Mr Beadon's farm bailiff. The prisoner when in custody asked permission to have his pencil, and the constable took out his pocket book for the purpose of restoring the pencil to him, when [the] prisoner made a grasp at the £5 note which was also in the pocket book, and, putting it into his mouth, swallowed it in a moment. Mr Parker, surgeon, and his stomach pump were soon in requisition, and succeeded, after many powerful efforts, in restoring the £5 note to the astonished constable safe and sound.

HELP WANTED

If one knows the date, time, and interviewer's name for a historic radio broadcast, what are the chances the recording is still around? This appeal relates to the below newspaper article from 1959.

Kent police at work – interviews on radio

IN the Home Service at 6.40 p.m. on Monday, June 15th, David Lloyd James will introduce different aspects of the work of the Kent County Constabulary.

He begins the programme by interviewing the Deputy Chief Constable, Mr. R. C. M. Jenkins, who has had 40 years' service as a police officer.

After this, Inspr. Parkin talks about recruiting, Chief Inspr. Scutt reports on training schemes, Chief Inspr. Mott, on the information room, P.C. Cork on the work of the rural police, and Inspr. Curton on the work of the river police.

There will also be items about the women police, police work at Dover, and a demonstration of driving on the "skid-pan."

The programme ends with a




COLONEL G.
WHITE

MR. R. C. M.
JENKINS

summing-up by the Chief Constable, Colonel Geoffrey White.