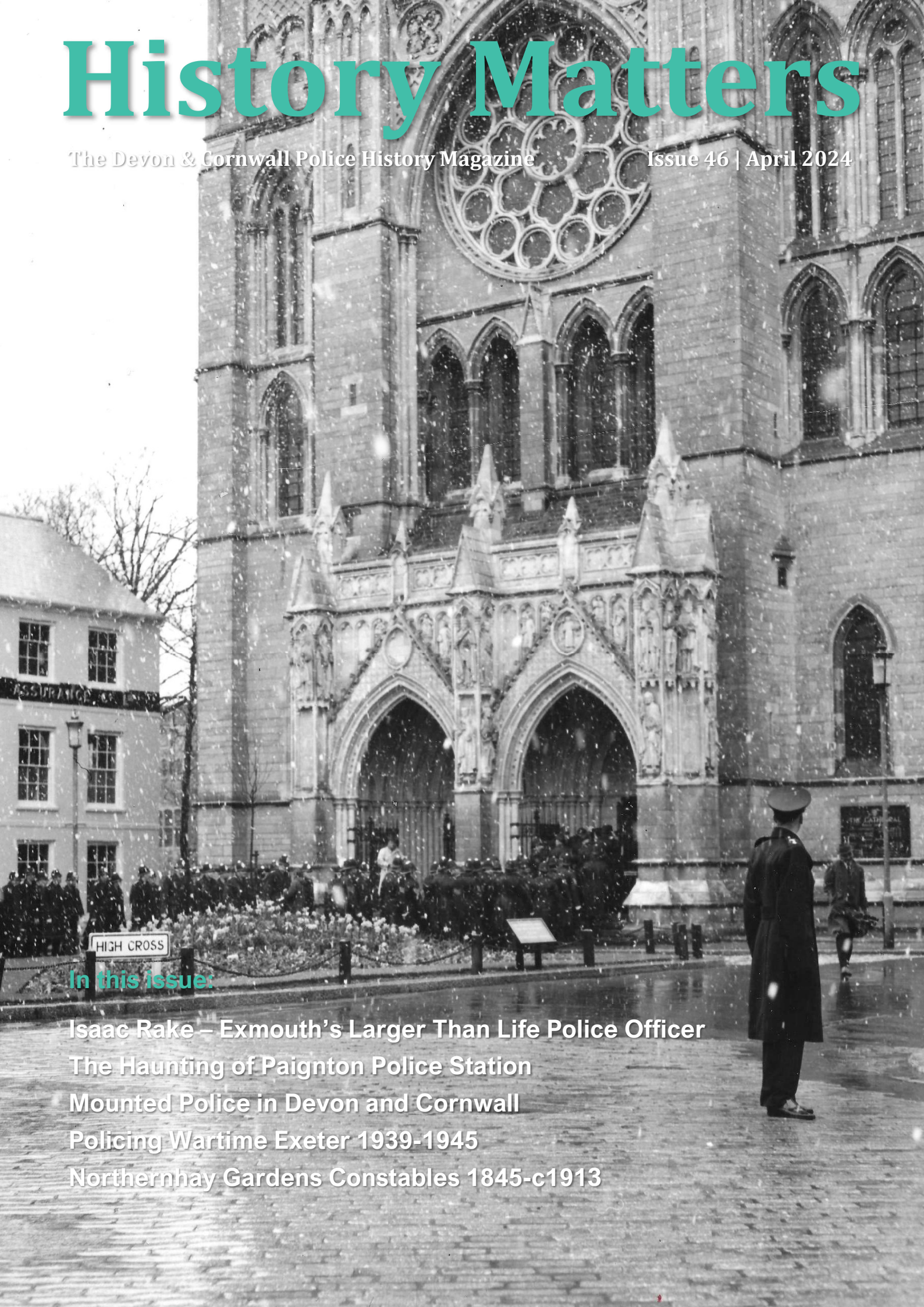


History Matters

The Devon & Cornwall Police History Magazine

Issue 46 | April 2024



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Isaac Rake – Exmouth's Larger Than Life Police Officer

The Haunting of Paignton Police Station

Mounted Police in Devon and Cornwall

Policing Wartime Exeter 1939-1945

Northernhay Gardens Constables 1845-c1913

Welcome to Issue 46 of 'History Matters – The Devon & Cornwall Police History Magazine'. This month we look at the life of Exmouth's Isaac Rake, spooky goings on at Paignton Police Station, and the history of mounted police in Devon and Cornwall.

This month also marks the 5th anniversary of the force history magazine. Thank you to all who continue to support it.

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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Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall (MOPIDAC)

The Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall was formally opened by T/CC Colwell and PCC Hernandez on 5th March 2024. It is located at the Court Gate, Tavistock, on Bedford Square and is FREE to visit.

Open Fridays 11am-3pm Apr-Oct

If you are interested in volunteering, contact alison.holmes@dcpolicingmuseum.co.uk

Front cover image: A procession of the Cornwall Constabulary files into Truro Cathedral on 9th March 1967 to mark the end of the force prior to the amalgamation with Devon and Plymouth. (*Author's Collection*)

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

Tel: 07305545399

Social media: @TheRothOfKhan (X/Twitter)

ISAAC RAKE – EXMOUTH’S LARGER THAN LIFE PARISH CONSTABLE

At 6ft 5in, **Isaac Rake** cut an imposing figure. He was born in Bridport, Dorset, in 1815 to Elizabeth Warren and Ambrose Rake (a flax merchant). At age 18 he joined the Metropolitan Police and was on duty inside Westminster Abbey during the coronation of Queen Victoria in 1838. He was also in the abbey when Victoria married Albert in 1839.¹



Artist John Martin's depiction of the Coronation, and an insight into what Constable Rake may have witnessed. (Public Domain Image)

Rake left the Metropolitan Police and moved to Littleham, near Exmouth, in the early 1840s. In 1842, the *Parish Constables Act* was passed which gave parish vestries the power

to appoint paid police officers. Rake was appointed as a paid constable for Exmouth and Littleham that year and made quite the name for himself.

Cockfighting, which had been declared illegal in 1654 by Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, was a serious problem in Exmouth. The grounds of the old Manor House in Exmouth were used to stage the 'mains' and early in Rake's constableness he received information that a contest was to take place. Rake decided stealth was the best policy and waited until the contest began. Climbing over a wall into the manor grounds, he caught them in the act, took down the names of every man and woman, and reported them to the Petty Sessions Court at Woodbury. This act single-handedly brought an end to cockfighting in Exmouth.

Rake's towering stature was a deterrent to the unruly, and so notorious was he that the locals conjured up a doggerel verse in his honour. It was posted on the hoardings of the Local Board of Health, and went:

*"G stands for giant, our friend Mr Rake, A report on the dust-holes he now has to make: The smells are so varied, something fresh every hour; It makes him so hungry, dead cats he'd devour."*²

Rake married Elizabeth Godfrey, a woman eight years his senior, at Littleham Parish Church on 22nd April 1845.³ Elizabeth died in 1881 and Rake remarried in 1882 to Angelina Taylor of Exmouth.

¹ 'Death of the Oldest Policeman' Yorkshire Evening News - Monday 07 October 1907, p4

² 'Isaac Rake of Exmouth' Out of the Blue: History of the Devon Constabulary – Hutchings, Walter J. – p24

³ Devon Marriages and Banns – Find My Past

As town constable, Rake held the keys to the local lockup, known as 'The Clink', which was located at the corner of Market Street and Rolle Street. It was here that Rake endured one of the most bizarre incidents of his career. Sometime in the 1850s, Rake arrested a French bear tamer for drunkenness. Not knowing what to do with the bear, Rake slung the Frenchman and the animal into the cell together, thus possibly becoming the only policeman in history to have taken a bear into custody! In the middle of the night, Rake checked on the prisoner and found him asleep. The bear, however, was awake and got Isaac into terrifying embrace. Rake's cries for help woke the prisoner, who managed to wrestle the animal away from him. Deciding that self-preservation was the best policy, Rake released the man-bear duo, marched them out of town, and warned them never to return.

Regrettably, the site of this encounter no longer exists, for the lockup was demolished sometime in the late 19th century; a consequence of criminal justice reform and improvements in prisoner welfare.

The formation of the Devon Constabulary late in 1856 rendered Rake's position obsolete as well-uniformed county constables assumed control of policing in Exmouth. Not quite ready to retire from constabulary duty, Rake applied for a position in the county police and was successful. He was sworn in as a police sergeant on 24th January 1857; the first holder of collar number '5'.

By 1861, Rake had been removed from Exmouth to Ashburton as a result of the routine practice of county constabularies moving their workforce around every few years. On 28th January 1864, Rake resigned from the Devon Constabulary and returned to Exmouth. He thereafter became the Inspector of Nuisances for the town.

Even though parish constables had essentially been rendered obsolete by various Acts of Parliament, towns like Exmouth continued to appoint them. Thus, at the time Rake became Inspector of Nuisances, he was also sworn in as a parish constable and continued to act as a lawman for many years more. There are no known photographs of Isaac Rake. All we have is the description given by journalist W. Gorfing of the *Exmouth Journal*:

"A fine figure of a man, over 6ft in height, lean and wiry, with a deeply-lined brown face, clean shaven, and wearing a pepper and salt morning suit and a tall felt hat of old-fashioned type..."

Isaac Rake, Exmouth's larger than life constable, died in 1907 at the grand old age of 93. He was buried in Littleham Churchyard.



The grave of Isaac Rake at St Margaret and St Andrew Churchyard, Littleham. Also named are his second wife Angelina, who died in 1918. (Find A Grave)

THE HAUNTING OF PAIGNTON POLICE STATION



1971, an ordinary night shift in Torbay. A duty inspector, out on patrol, is summoned by radio back to Paignton Police Station. Upon dutifully reporting back to base, he is told a very strange story by a young constable who, quite literally, looked like he had seen a ghost.

Paignton Police Station was one of the new builds erected in the 1970s as part of a revitalisation of the police estate by the Devon & Cornwall Police Authority. Many of the force's police stations, red bricked and damp, were well over a hundred years old and in much need of replacement. Those that succeeded them were of the brutalist variety, many of which are still in use today. The new site at the corner of Blatchcombe and Southfield Road replaced old police digs on Palace Avenue. It was spacious, modern, and eventually became one of the divisional control room locations with a coveted Police National Computer terminal.

On that unusual night in 1971, the inspector was told by the young policeman that, as he walked along a corridor on the second floor on the approach to the police canteen, he stopped dead in his tracks at a most frightful sight. That of a woman, dressed in a grey cloak, who drifted silently across the corridor and disappeared through a wall.

The paint had barely dried upon the walls of the new Paignton nick, so how could it possess the restive spirits of the dearly departed? Assuming there are rules to paranormal happenings, the only point of reference is the ground upon which the police station was built. Prior to the police authority's purchase of the land, a house stood with a high-walled, very overgrown garden. Within it resided two old ladies who lived reclusive lives. The house was quite neglected, and over time its mysterious residents became a source of superstition, particularly around the subject of a servant girl spirit. When the ladies passed away, the site was a piece of prime real estate, the house was demolished, and the land duly acquired by the constabulary.

Some years after the 1971 incident, a police inspector working at night on the second floor, who was busying himself with paperwork, observed a stack of files lift from his desk and scatter around the room. In another instance, the station barman nipped out to his car one night via the fire exit and was impeded by the sensation of the grip of an icy hand on his arm which remained cold to the touch for quite some time after.

Later, in the 1980s when the station was the site of a divisional control room, further unusual episodes were reported. The control room was located on the second floor, exactly where the historic supernatural events of the 1970s had taken place. The first inkling something odd was going on was when the Police National Computer, accessible by only one VDU in the building, began to malfunction. Strange "snowy" characters began to appear on the screen, and despite the intervention of a Home Office technician the source of the problem could not be found.

Other electrical disturbances caused concern; control rooms were becoming increasingly computerised, and some of the equipment would turn itself on at will. A superintendent even saw an electrical switch move as if manipulated by a human hand. Convinced the problem was the fault of electrical surges, the superintendent ordered an urgent inspection of the wiring, which was found by electricians to be perfectly sound.

Paignton Police Station was vacated by Devon & Cornwall Police in the early 2010s and the site was sold for housing.



Mounted Police in Devon and Cornwall

The effect of a police constable on horseback is undeniable. The formidable equine is both majestic and dangerous. The rioting felon must balance the desire to breach the peace with the risk of being on the receiving end of a hoof for which, of course, the horse cannot be held liable. The modern Devon & Cornwall Police does not have a mounted section, but many of its predecessor forces did.

Nine small constabularies were established in Cornwall in 1836 according to the requirements of the *Municipal Corporations Act* in Bodmin, Falmouth, Helston, Launceston, Liskeard, Penryn, Penzance, St Ives, and Truro. None are known to have formed mounted *sections*, however the corporations which governed these constabularies owned horses which were from time to time used by the superintendents and constables. The corporation horses in each town were the same animals that pulled the dust carts and fire brigade pumps and were quite literally the 'workhorses' of the town. On 20th June 1837, a Truronian constable on horseback led a procession of civic officials when the ascension of Queen Victoria to the throne was proclaimed.

The Cornwall Constabulary was formed in principle in 1856 and began recruitment in 1857. The Court of Quarter Sessions for the county sanctioned the requisition of police horses for the force, initially at Launceston, Bodmin, Liskeard, and Truro. Another was kept at headquarters (The Priory, Bodmin) on a reserve basis in the event one of the divisional horses became sick or injured. They were primarily ridden by the divisional superintendents, and each horse was cared for by a constable who acted as groom and coachman.⁴ The horses were both ridden and hauled four-wheeled wagons, the latter usually for prisoner transport to Bodmin Gaol. **Superintendent Gifford** (Callington) patrolled his division on horseback and was a stickler for horse-related offences. In the early months of 1857, Gifford brought prosecutions against many individuals for riding without reins or for leaving their gigs unattended at the roadside. In each case, the defendant was heavily fined. Gifford's campaign was undone in September 1857 when he himself was summoned to court for leaving his gig unattended. Regrettably, the outcome of the case is not a matter of record. Whatever the result, Gifford was called upon to resign a month later.

⁴ Cornwall Constabulary Centenary, p4



Left. Horse-drawn wagon typical of the kind used by the Cornwall Constabulary to transport prisoners to gaol. This example is the St Columb Horse Bus. The men in the pillbox hats are inspectors.

(Simon Dell Collection)

Below. Cornish Superintendent William Gard pictured in Bodmin. Four-wheeled wagons were used because they were more comfortable to ride in.

(Simon Dell Collection).





Deputy Chief Constable William Beare (Cornwall Constabulary) photographed in Bodmin in the late 19th Century. (Simon Dell Collection)

In Devon in 1836, municipal police forces were established in Barnstaple, Bideford, Dartmouth, Devonport, Exeter, Honiton, Plymouth (see article header – Trevor Finbow Collection), South Molton, Tavistock, Tiverton, and Totnes. Like their Cornish counterparts, horses were used sparingly, however in the Devon Constabulary (formed 1856-57), there was significant investment in stabling, saddles, bridles, forage, and other equine accoutrements. The below illustration shows Devon superintendents and a police horse in 1871 (*Simon Dell Collection*).





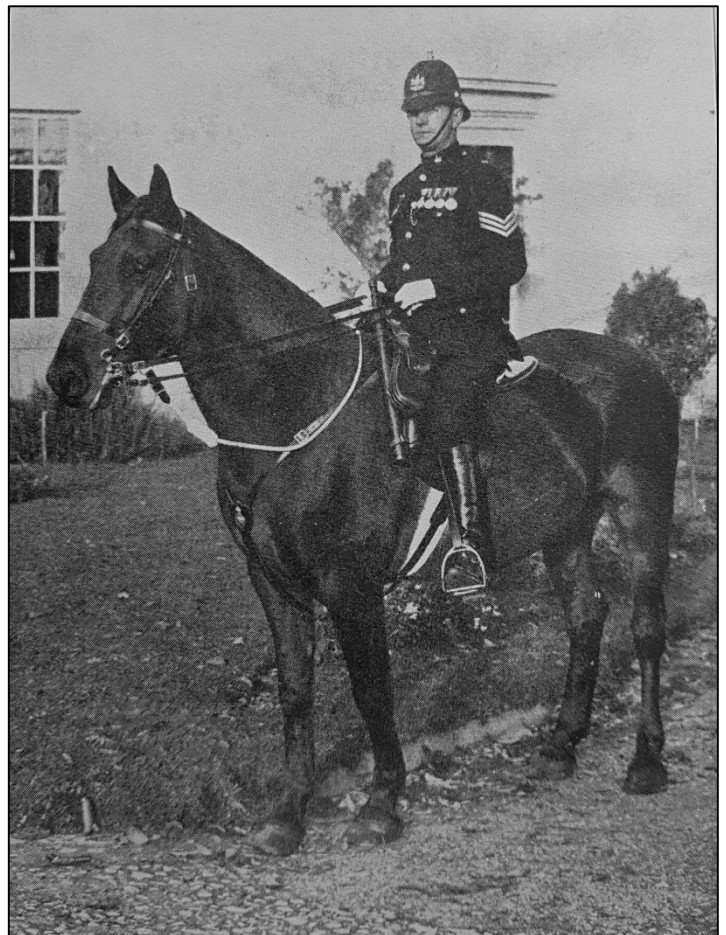
Above. Group of Devon Constabulary mounted officers in the 1930s, location unknown.
Below. PC Takle (left) and Inspector Perry of the Tiverton Borough Police, c1920. *(Both images from the collection of Simon Dell)*





Left. Sergeant Fred Williams (Tiverton Borough Police) photographed on horseback at the Devon County Show in 1925. The horse was loaned by Sir Richard Heathcoat-Amory, 3rd Baronet. (*Simon Dell Collection*)

Below. Unknown sergeant of the Exeter City Police force circa 1936. (*Editor's Collection*)





Above. Group of Exeter City Police mounted officers circa 1920. (*Simon Dell Collection*)

The usefulness of horses naturally declined with the coming of the motor car. The *Road Traffic Act 1930* led to the formation of traffic units in most Home Office police forces, and thus the reliable steed was resigned to undertaking ceremonial work such as civic parades and county shows.



In 1978, **Chief Constable John Alderson** (Devon & Cornwall Police) proposed a mounted unit for the force. Alderson, who was previously Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, had undertaken riding courses at Imber Court (the Met's police horse training centre) for parade purposes. He was recently inspired by the sight of the West Midlands Police horses that took part in the force cavalcade, as well as the

Avon and Somerset Constabulary horsemen (pictured overleaf – D&C Annual Report 1978) who provided mutual aid to Devon in the search for missing teenager Genette Tate in the summer of that year.



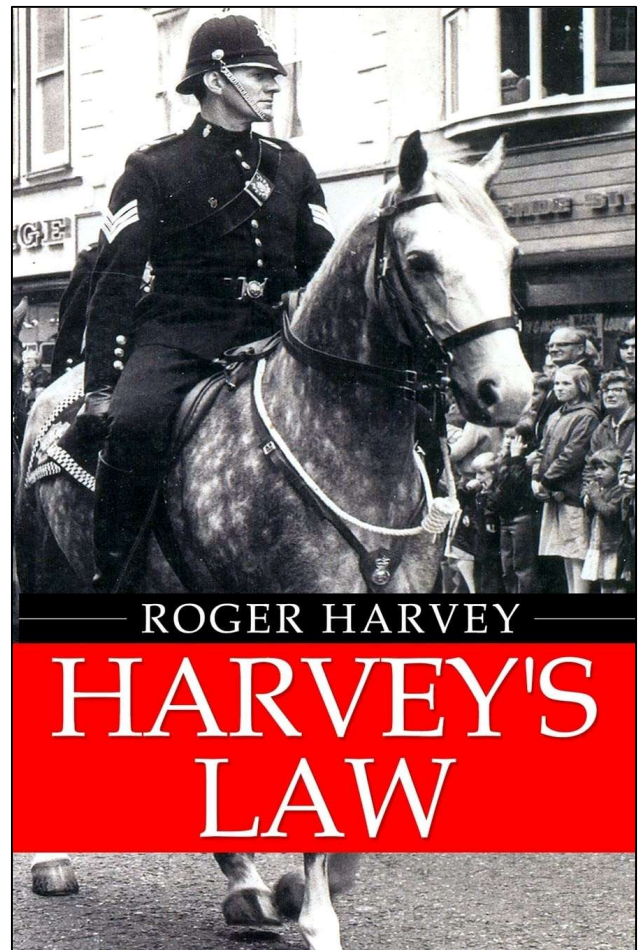
Alderson (pictured left – SWPHCT) envisaged that the mounted section could consist of riders from the special constabulary in the first instance, pending government approval for a permanent situation staffed with members of the regular force. Truro's **Detective Inspector Roger Harvey**, an experienced horseman, was selected by Alderson as the head of the unit, with the caveat that he would have to relocate to Exeter. He did so, albeit choosing to make his home at Sampford Peverell, a small village about halfway between Tiverton and the Somerset border.

In anticipation of the mounted unit's formation, Harvey attended an Imber Court training course with the Met and officers from other UK and international forces. His book *Harvey's Law* describes how his specially tailored mounted uniform was supplied with a pair of winged riding breeches which drew friendly derision from fellow trainees, particularly a vocal Yorkshireman who suggested that Harvey might take flight if he didn't hold onto his horse!

After training, Harvey returned to Devon and was asked by the chief constable to parade with the Avon and Somerset Constabulary mounted section at the upcoming police cavalcade in Exeter. Harvey's own four-year-old 16' 2" gelding, named *Grey*, was selected and taken to Bristol for rehearsal. Grey was rescued by Harvey in 1975, having been spotted in a field during the course of a criminal investigation. Enquiries were made with the landowner, and Grey was purchased for £135. The police cavalcade went without a hitch, with Grey performing admirably despite the cacophony of sounds from the Devon & Cornwall Constabulary Band and the force motorcycle unit which took part in the procession. Over the course of 1978, Grey was worked and exercised regularly on the mid-Devon back roads and his rider encountered and dealt with a plethora of incidents, as well as attending events on a ceremonial basis, including the opening of a horse training school on Bodmin Moor.

Regrettably, government funding for a substantial mounted police unit was not sanctioned, and thus Harvey and Grey were to be Devon & Cornwall Constabulary's first and last. Harvey retired in 1983 and returned to Cornwall.

Harvey wrote of his experiences as the force's one and only mounted police officer in the book *Harvey's Law*, which features a splendid photograph (right) of the force's only police horse Grey at the police cavalcade in Exeter.

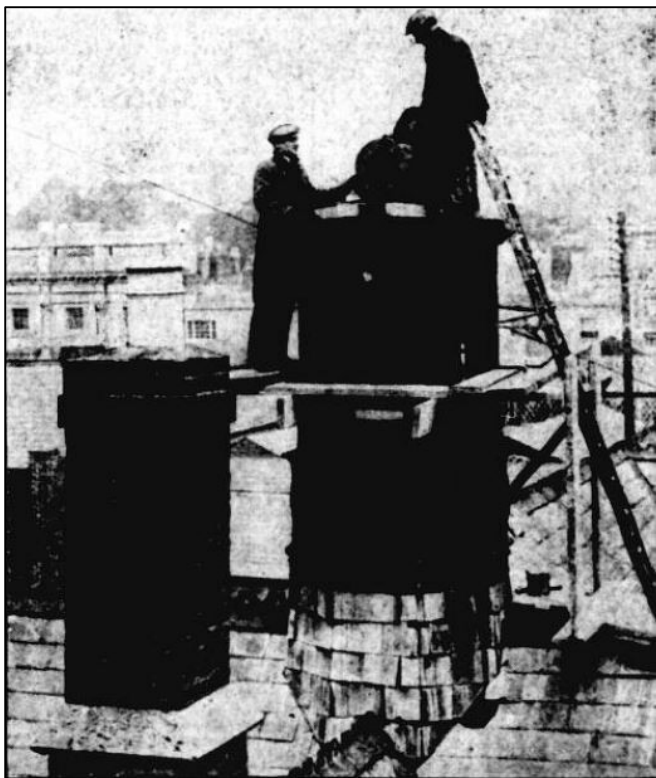


POLICING WARTIME EXETER 1939-1945

In May 1942, a German radio broadcast allegedly reported: "Exeter is the jewel of the west; we have destroyed that jewel, and we will return to finish the job". Bold and terrifying words from a time that remains in living memory for some. The enemy broadcaster was not quite correct, for Exeter's citizens endured and a new, if badly scarred, city rose from the ashes into the conurbation we know today. This article looks at how Exeter was affected by the Second World War, and how its determined police force played its part in defending it.

Preparing for War

War with Nazi Germany was predicted for many years, and police forces trained for air raids throughout the 1930s. Early in 1939, an air raid siren was installed atop Waterbeer Street Police Station. Manufactured by Gent & Co. of Leicester, it was mains powered and was first tested on 22nd February. Selected citizens in different parts of the city were issued with cards and were asked to provide feedback on the siren's range for the information of the A.R.P. Controller.



Installation of the air raid siren on the roof of Waterbeer Street Police Station, Exeter. Image from Express and Echo - Wednesday 22 February 1939, page 8. (© The British Newspaper Archive/Reach PLC)

The War Clouds Break

On 1st September 1939, three days before war was formally declared, **Chief Constable Frederick Tarry** cancelled all leave and enacted a new shift pattern: twelve hours' duty, twelve hours' rest. Twenty-one officers were required to live and sleep in the former Packers Tobacconist store (next door to the police station) which had been outfitted as a dormitory. They were required to muster immediately upon the sound of an air raid siren. The remainder of the force was obliged to report to the nearest police telephone kiosk, whether on or off duty, upon the sounding of the siren to receive orders.

PC Arthur Drew, who was appointed not long after the war began, found there was nobody available to train him, and he was posted on permanent night duty until a method was devised for tutoring him. The twelve on, twelve off shift pattern soon exhausted the rank and file, and eight months later it was rescinded.

Air Raid Precautions (ARP) was a serious business for every constabulary, and in Exeter there were two chief constables working for the good of the people. Whereas Frederick Tarry was working to protect the city and its boundary, over at Middlemoor, **Lyndon Henry Morris**, chief constable of the Devon Constabulary and county ARP Controller, put in measures to protect the entire county.

Rules and Regulations

One of the strictest of ARP rules involved the leaving of bicycles unattended. It was feared that enemy paratroopers would steal them and cycle off into the night, so it was incumbent upon the

police to seize them and wait for the owner to come forward for a ticking off.

PC 'Rocky' Stone, well known in the force for his unconventional policing style, found a novel way of dealing with the problem. One evening during the war, whilst on duty at the Exe Bridge telephone kiosk, Stone was approached by an exasperated young constable pushing a bicycle. The constable complained to PC Stone of the tiresome need to push seized bicycles all the way up the main street to the police station. PC Stone reassured him there was no need. Without further ado, PC Stone whipped the bicycle out of the officer's hands and slung it over the railings into the River Exe. Sometime later, word of PC Stone's methods reached the chief constable, who asked the Canal Authority to dredge the river. Over one hundred bicycles were found on the riverbed!

Police Reserves

A reserve constabulary was formed in Exeter in 1940. The aforementioned PC Drew, who had been working night shifts for months without a tutor, was trained alongside the reserves, much to his relief. The head of the reserve was **Albert Edgar Rowsell**, a member of the regular force who succeeded Mr Tarry in 1941 as chief constable upon the former's appointment to Southampton Constabulary. Tarry's appointment at Southampton was necessary following the sudden resignation of the chief constable there. The heavy enemy bombing in Southampton had a profound effect and was more than the chief constable could handle, a situation that was also found amongst the demoralised Southampton officers upon Tarry's arrival. Tarry later sent a contingent of Southampton constables to Exeter in exchange for Exeter men as a means of allowing for some measure of recuperation. They occupied the Packers dormitory and were required to report for duty for emergencies only.

Early Air Raids and the Home Guard

On the evening of 7th August 1940, a lone Luftwaffe bomber appeared in the skies over Exeter and let loose five bombs. Little damage was caused, and the press reported on the narrow

escape of a middle-aged man who was able to walk to a first aid post, a dead canary, and several dead chickens. In existence by this time was the 1st (Loyal City of Exeter) Battalion of the Devon Home Guard. The city's very own 'Dad's Army' was formed on 29th May 1940 under the command of Major A. Antsey. In the first few weeks of the battalion's life, the job of enrolling volunteers fell to the police which created an exasperating situation for Chief Constable Rowsell who became responsible for examining and approving each volunteer. Thankfully, recruiting duties soon passed to the battalion commander. Despite taking a step back from Home Guard recruitment, the chief constable remained interested in the battalion and after the war turned out to the formal opening of the unit's Old Comrades Association building on Holloway Street.

The 'Baedeker Blitz'

On the evening of 23rd April 1942, 49 bombers appeared over Exeter and rained fire and fury on the city. The weather was on the side of the Exonians that night and many of the bombs missed their targets. Five people were killed however, and over 200 houses destroyed. 24 hours later, the bombers returned, this time on a clear night. Two waves of twenty bombers devastated the city, leaving 73 dead and 23 injured. A further raid on the following night killed another three before the bombers turned their attentions to Bath, Canterbury, York, and Norwich.

The devastation caused in Exeter was unprecedented, and demanded the full attention of the city's police, fire, and civil defence services in extinguishing fire, treating casualties, and recovering bodies from the rubble. The April raids though were only the tip of the iceberg. A little before midnight on 3rd May 1942, a small raid occurred causing some minor fires, leaving the police and civil defence services largely unconcerned. At 1.36am the following morning, 20 low-flying bombers skimmed the River Exe and then climbed high into the sky, then returned 20 minutes later and dropped incendiary bombs on the parish of Newtown and the main street. By 2.15am, much of the city was ablaze. As police

officers, fire fighters, home guardsmen, and air raid wardens pulled civilians from the burning rubble, the Luftwaffe cruelly strafed them with machinegun fire. The city burned for five days; 156 people died, 563 people were injured, and over 30 acres of houses and buildings were destroyed.



Exeter High Street in ruins. The three constables are members of the Southampton Constabulary on relief duties in Exeter. (Simon Dell Collection)

Special Constable Killed



Special Constable Harold Rowland Luxton (pictured above – David Luxton Collection) was at home in the early hours of 4th May 1942, and upon hearing the air raid siren, threw on his police uniform, grabbed his son Peter by the arm and ushered him towards the back door. A single incendiary bomb hurtled through an upstairs window and came to rest on a chair, and both father and son ran back upstairs where SC Luxton picked up the device, which was still spitting flames, and lobbed it back out of the window. He then hurried his son to the air raid shelter and told him to stay put, promising to return once he had

located Mrs Luxton. It was the last time Peter saw his father alive. Luxton headed into Sidwell Street in search of his wife, he was killed by a bomb. The story's added tragedy comes in the knowledge that Mrs Luxton was already in the bomb shelter, having fled there upon the sounding of the air raid siren. The editor is grateful to Peter Luxton for sharing such a sad and intimate story. Life had to go on in Exeter, and it was fortunate that no more bombing occurred after the devastating May raids.

Women Constables

In 1944, five women constables were appointed in the force's war reserve, although were not permitted to join the regular force after the war (the first regular woman constable, **PW1 Phyllis Wooldridge**, was appointed in 1949).

Exeter Policemen on Military Service

Unlike the First World War, the office of constable was a reserved occupation during the Second World War, and the rules around enlistment generally prevented policemen from joining the colours. Late in 1940 however, the rules were relaxed, and several Exeter policemen joined the Royal Air Force. PC Arthur Drew served in 74 Squadron and returned to the police after the war. **PC Bert Cody** also joined up and returned to the force after three years. **PC William Donald Carlyon Hawken** was not so fortunate. He was killed in a plane crash in France on 19th March 1944, aged 23. **PC Samuel John Richards** died in Germany on 13th August of the same year, aged 28.

The departure of these officers to the RAF required the appointment of replacements. The vacancies were filled by six men from the Exeter Gas, Light & Electric Company, which was another reserved occupation. The move from one reserved occupation to another was to some seen as a means of avoiding military service, and they suffered greatly from the public and their peers as, "...one of them from the gas board, avoiding the call up."

Emergency Food Stores

Food was a matter of national importance during the war, and the Exeter City Police force was well-

prepared to feed and water its members in the event of a shortage. Ten locations across the city were nominated as food stores, mainly the cellars and under stairs cupboards of policemen of sergeant rank and above. The chief constable, who lived at 32 South Avenue, was the custodian of 56lbs of sugar and 12lbs of tea. **Police Sergeant Collins**, of 20 Cordery Road, looked after five dozen tins of baked beans and three dozen tins of diced carrots. Other commodities such as jars of meat paste and other tinned, non-perishable items were kept under lock and key by members of the force at various houses across Exeter.

Operation Starfish

The air raids on Exeter taught the civil defence services that the Luftwaffe preferred to illuminate their targets at night with incendiary bombs before unleashing heavier ordnance. As a result of the 1942 raids, the police took steps to fool the enemy into bombing lighter targets or draw fire away from people and buildings altogether. Codenamed 'Starfish', the scheme involved lighting decoy fires in open spaces such as parks and fields in hope that the enemy bombers would drop their payloads there rather than on built up areas. Upon the sounding of a night-time air raid siren, officers involved in the scheme reported to a police telephone kiosk and received orders from headquarters on where to light the fires. If the kiosk was found to be inoperable, they were to report to the next nearest kiosk. The operation, which was part of a national scheme devised by the Air Ministry, was extremely prescriptive and highly classified, albeit too late to prevent much of the damage caused to the city by the Luftwaffe.

Wartime Boy Messengers

Alongside the special constabulary, police war reserve, women's corps and first police reserve was another large auxiliary - the Police Auxiliary Messenger Service. Shortened to 'PAMS', the force largely consisted of boys aged 14 to 18. The Home Office had foreseen that lines of communication would be disrupted or destroyed during air raids, and the PAMS existed as a countermeasure. Joining the PAMS required only enthusiasm and a bicycle, and Exeter's contingent was established in

January 1941 and consisted of 100 lads divided across 12 sections led by a section leader (a regular, adult, member of the force). Each messenger was provided with a steel helmet, a respirator, and notepad. In the winter, capes and leggings were provided for warmth. Training in topography, message writing, first aid and fire bomb instruction was provided. A good working knowledge of the geography of Exeter was required, and one can only imagine the dangers they faced darting around burning rubble in pitch darkness as bombs fell around them.

Messenger James Henry Reynolds, aged 18, was commended for bravery during the air raid of 4th May 1942. When the alert was sounded, Reynolds was instructed by Police Sergeant Norden to take a message to the Report Centre. En route to his destination he was obstructed by a wall of flames and suffered severe face and neck burns trying to get through. Despite his injuries, he continued throughout the morning, stopping to assist the fire brigade on several occasions and rendered every assistance possible to the police.

The State of the Force in 1943

By August 1943, the regular force was dwarfed by the number of police auxiliaries, thanks in part to the loss of fifty members to the Army and RAF. 52 regulars remained on the home front, supported by 250 special constables, 16 members of the Women's Auxiliary Police Corps, 57 police war reserves, 94 PAMS, and three members of the First Police Reserve. **Auxiliary Policewoman Ivy Mabel West** married PC Donald Carlyon Hawken in 1942 and wore her police uniform on the wedding day. Towards the end of the war, the number of PAMS had decreased by a quarter as many of them reached the age of enlistment and joined the armed forces.

Come war's end, the Exeter force was weary and exhausted. Their city was forever changed, but things could have been far worse if not for the bravery and dedicated of the men and women of the great Exeter City Police force.

Northernhay Gardens Constables

1845-1913



Exeter's stunning Northernhay Gardens, in the present sandwiched between Central Railway Station and Rougemont Castle, were laid out in 1612 and are the oldest public pleasure grounds in England. The gardens were destroyed in 1642 during the English Civil War to make way for fortifications but were reinstated in 1664. Since then, they have been maintained to an exceptionally high standard and are very much a jewel of the City of Exeter. Public spaces inevitably give rise to crime and nuisances, and in December 1845 the Northernhay Improvement Committee, a subcommittee of Exeter City Council, resolved to install two lodgekeepers who would live and work there full time to maintain the grounds and prevent nuisances and depredations therein. It was further resolved:

"...that the lodgekeepers to be appointed will be sworn as petty constables, for the purposes of preventing improprieties in the public walks".⁵

It seems the council renewed the policing situation infrequently, for in June 1864 we find the subcommittee making a fresh resolution:

"The committee reported the necessity of making two gardeners constables for the purpose of preserving order on Northernhay".⁶

One of the constables in the 1870s was **William Baker**⁷, possibly the same William Baker who was discharged from the Exeter City Police force on 11th March 1876 through ill health.⁸ Another, who served for over thirty years, was **Martin Woosley**⁹ whose name does not appear in the registers of the city police. The constables were often very effective and did well to preserve the gardens for the enjoyment of Exonians. In 1877, both constables were able to prove significant criminal damage against the lime trees and rhododendron bushes by a 13-year-old lad named Percy Munday. The boy was reported to court and the prosecution was conducted by **Thomas Bent**, the chief constable of the city police.¹⁰ Constable Woosley, on account of his age, transferred to the quieter Bury Meadow grounds in 1905.¹¹ He was replaced by Mr R.L. Steer who, based on the following 1913 excerpt, was also appointed as a constable: *"A retired warrant officer of the Indian Army, named James Carter, died suddenly while in Northernhay Grounds about 11.15 yesterday. He was observed to fall, and Park Constables Bolt and Steer ran to his assistance".¹²*

⁵ 'Town Council of Exeter' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette - Saturday 13 December 1845, p3

⁶ 'Northernhay' Western Times - Friday 10 June 1864, p6

⁷ 'Guildhall' Western Times - Wednesday 28 May 1879, p3

⁸ Exeter City Police Nominal Register, archive reference 1975.00453.001, South West Police Heritage Collections Trust

⁹ 'Exeter Police Court' Western Times - Wednesday 28 May 1890, p2

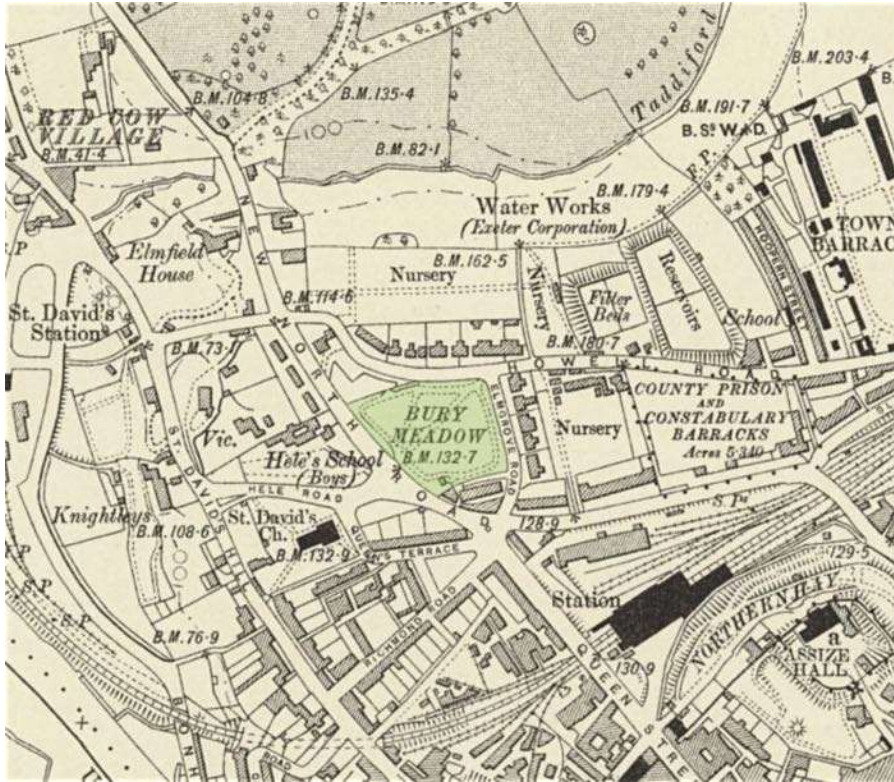
¹⁰ 'Exeter Police Court' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette - Monday 26 March 1877, p3

¹¹ 'Exeter Affairs' Western Times - Monday 22 May 1905, p2

¹² 'Sudden Death on Northernhay Exeter' Western Times - Saturday 07 June 1913, p3

BURY MEADOW CONSTABLES

1845-unknown



Exeter's Bury Meadow, a small park on New North Road between St David's Railway Station and HMP Exeter, was commissioned as a place of public recreation in the late 17th century. In 1832, it was a place of mass burial of cholera victims. In April 1845, an Improvement Commission took over maintenance responsibility for the park and leased four acres of land for a public promenade and playground. The commissioners also appointed a groundskeeper who was sworn as a constable; his name was **David Bowden**.¹³ He was paid 12 shillings per week and was granted use of the park lodge as a place of residence.¹⁴

Bowden's name appears frequently in local press articles in relation to his dual role as park keeper and constable, such as the following report from 1847:

"Henry Bale was charged by David Bowden, the policeman at Bury Meadow, with having broken down some thorns and pulled up some stocks in that popular place of public recreation. When the prisoner saw Bowden, he jumped over the hedge. Bowden jumped after him, caught him, and brought him to the station house. The mayor said it was a very serious case, for which the prisoner was liable to pay £5. He was sentenced to one week's hard labour".¹⁵

In November of the same year, former city **Police Inspector Wall** was enrolled as a constable by the Improvement Commission and was posted to Bury Meadow every Sunday from 2pm until the hour after sunset when the gates were locked. He was paid 2s 6d per week for his services.¹⁶

In 1864, the constables at Northernhay Gardens, another Exeter green space, were rather successful at driving out miscreants, the consequence being that those who wished to cause trouble went to Bury Meadow instead. The Improvement Commissioners maintained the services of a constable for the park, but were concerned about the effectiveness of only one man:

¹³ 'Exeter Police' Western Times - Saturday 17 October 1846, p6

¹⁴ 'Bury Meadow' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette - Saturday 14 February 1846, p3

¹⁵ 'Exeter Police News' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette - Saturday 26 June 1847, p7

¹⁶ 'Improvement Commissioners' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette - Friday 18 November 1864, p9

*“...the Bury Meadow keeper was sworn as a constable, but one was not sufficient to control the people who flocked there at a particular time”.*¹⁷

Superintendent Steele of the city police was asked if he could spare a man to assist the park constable, however the request was refused on the basis it would leave a deficiency in one of the city beats. The lodge at Bury Meadow was quite small and it was decided in 1873 that the future enrolment of the park keeper-constables would exclude men with children. This was decided when it was found that the incumbent's children had been sleeping in an outhouse that was quite unsuitable.¹⁸ It is unknown when the practice of appointing constables at Bury Meadow stopped. Constable Martin Woolsey, previously keeper of Northernhay Gardens, was transferred to Bury Meadow in 1905 to see in the twilight of his working years in relative peace (see previous article). It is unknown whether he retained his constable status at Bury Meadow.

Belmont Pleasure Grounds Constables

1886-1912

In August 1886, the Mayor of Exeter Mr R.R.M Daw Esq. revealed to Exeter Police Court that he had received several complaints of disorderly behaviour at Exeter's Belmont Gardens, a public pleasure ground only recently opened. Amongst the complainants was the Reverend T.H. Newman who said, “...the way in which people used the ground was anything but conducive to good order”¹⁹. In keeping with other situations in the city's green spaces, it was proposed that the groundskeeper at Belmont be sworn as a special constable, but this could not take place until the next meeting of the Police Watch Committee. In the meantime, the chief constable of the city police was directed to take action. On 29th September 1886, it was reported in the *Express and Echo*:

*“The Town Clerk report that John Lock, the keeper of the Belmont Pleasure Ground, had been appointed a police constable by the Watch Committee, and sworn in before the magistrates”.*²⁰

Lock was still serving at Belmont in 1903; a *Western Times* report notes how Lock, referred to in the report as “Superintendent”²¹, gave evidence to Exeter Police Court against two boys caught throwing stones and broken bottles within the park. He died in 1912, at the lodge in Belmont, aged 62. His successor was Joel H. Crosscombe, although he does not appear to have been sworn as a constable. Crosscombe died from tetanus in 1918 after cutting himself whilst pruning shrubs.

¹⁷ 'Bury Meadow and Bad Manners' *Western Times* - Friday 16 September 1864, p6

¹⁸ 'Groundkeeper for Bury Meadow' *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* - Friday 29 August 1873, p6

¹⁹ 'The Belmont Pleasure Ground' *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* Thursday 12 August 1886, p4

²⁰ 'Exeter Town Council' *Express and Echo* Wednesday 29 September 1886, p4

²¹ 'Exeter Day by Day' *Western Times* Friday 12 June 1903, p9

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

ESCAPED TIGER? MUST BE THE POLICE'S FAULT!

On 9th March 1861, a rather dubious incident was reported in the *Western Times*. Apparently, a captive tiger escaped from a den in Ashburton and made its way to Holne, some 4 miles as the crow flies. Upon arriving at the Tavistock Inn, it 'attacked' a beer barrel and began to drink from it causing it to become drowsy. The animal was eventually taken back to Ashburton in a cart. Somehow, a measure of blame was placed on the local police, as it was hoped they, "...will be more careful of beasts of that kind, and not allow them to ravage the country".

CORGI DEVON & CORNWALL POLICE CAR

Police cars don't come any cooler than the Ford Sierra Sapphire Cosworth in 1990s Devon & Cornwall Police livery. So cool in fact, that Corgi commissioned a limited edition die-cast model in 1:43 scale.



CAPTION COMPETITION



Up for grabs is a signed copy of **'Devon & Cornwall Cop Cars: The History of Police Transportation from the Pointy End'** published in 2019. All you have to do is provide a humorous caption to this photo. Winner will be announced in the next issue.

Responses please to 56658@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk

Closing date is 25th June 2024.

LIP SERVICE TO THE BLACKOUT RULES

On 24th May 1940, **War Reserve Constable Dawe** gave evidence against Exeter resident William Henry Hodge for lighting a bonfire in his garden, contrary to defence regulations in place due to the ongoing war. Dawe told the court that when he asked Hodge to put out the fire, Hodge responded:

"I could have been in the police like you, but I prefer to work for my living".²²

UNSANITARY CONVICTION

In the 1930s, police officers at the scene of a burglary at Bugle Railway Station in Cornwall found a rather unpleasant state of affairs. Either through nerves or dysentery, the burglar had soiled himself and trodden a trail through the station office. The suspect was located quickly and arrested on the strength of the state of his clothing and shoes. He naturally denied any wrongdoing, so the task of linking him to the crime scene fell to the Cornish pathologist Dr Hocking. By analytically comparing samples found on the suspect's shoes to those found at the railway station, Hocking was able to place the man at the scene. The exasperated suspect, who could not believe the nature of the evidence, was convicted of burglary at Penzance Petty Sessions Court and was very abusive towards Dr Hocking in the court room.

Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall (MOPIDAC)



**Museum Opening Times
2024**

**From April 5, 2024, we will open
every Friday until October**

11am - 3pm

**Mini-Museum, Tavistock Court Gate
building, Bedford Square**

Free Entry



²² 'Must Not Blaze – Bonfire an Offence in Blackout Time' Express and Echo - Friday 24 May 1940, p5