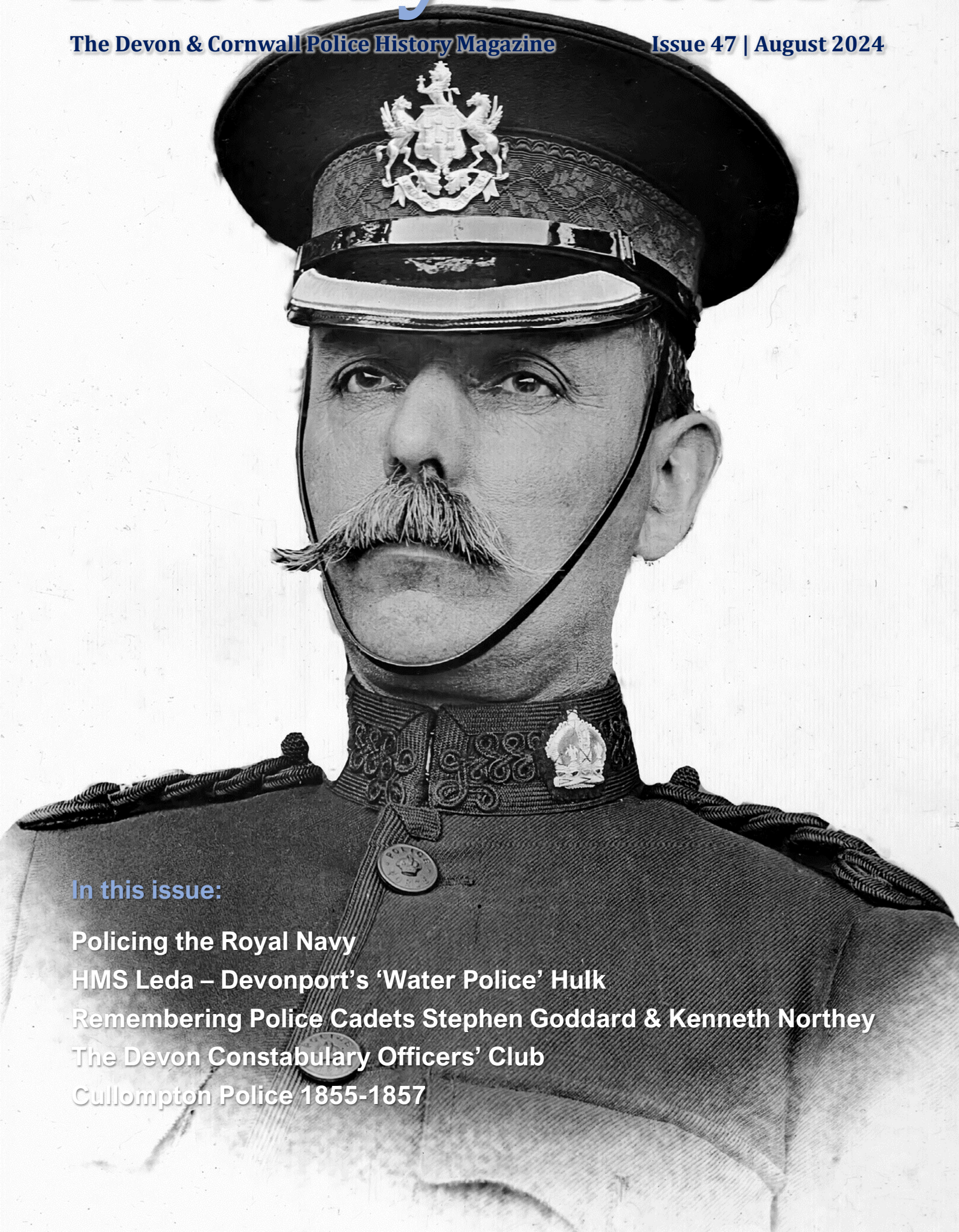


# History Matters

The Devon & Cornwall Police History Magazine

Issue 47 | August 2024



## In this issue:

Policing the Royal Navy

HMS Leda – Devonport's 'Water Police' Hulk

Remembering Police Cadets Stephen Goddard & Kenneth Northey

The Devon Constabulary Officers' Club

Cullompton Police 1855-1857



**Welcome** to Issue 47 of 'History Matters – The Devon & Cornwall Police History Magazine'. This month we start with a naval theme, taking in a potted history of policing the Royal Navy, followed by a look at Devonport's most unusual police station – the hulk of *HMS Leda*.

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

- **56658 Mark Rothwell**

## Contents

- 03** Policing the Royal Navy
- 05** HMS Leda – Devonport's 'Water Police' Hulk
- 06** Remembering Police Cadets  
Stephen Goddard & Kenneth Northey
- 07** The Devon Constabulary Officers Club
- 08** Remembering PC 190 Stephen Cortis  
...and more...

## Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall (MOPIDAC)

The Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall was formally opened by T/CC Jim Colwell and PCC Alison Hernandez on 5<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:alison.holmes@dcpolicingmuseum.co.uk)

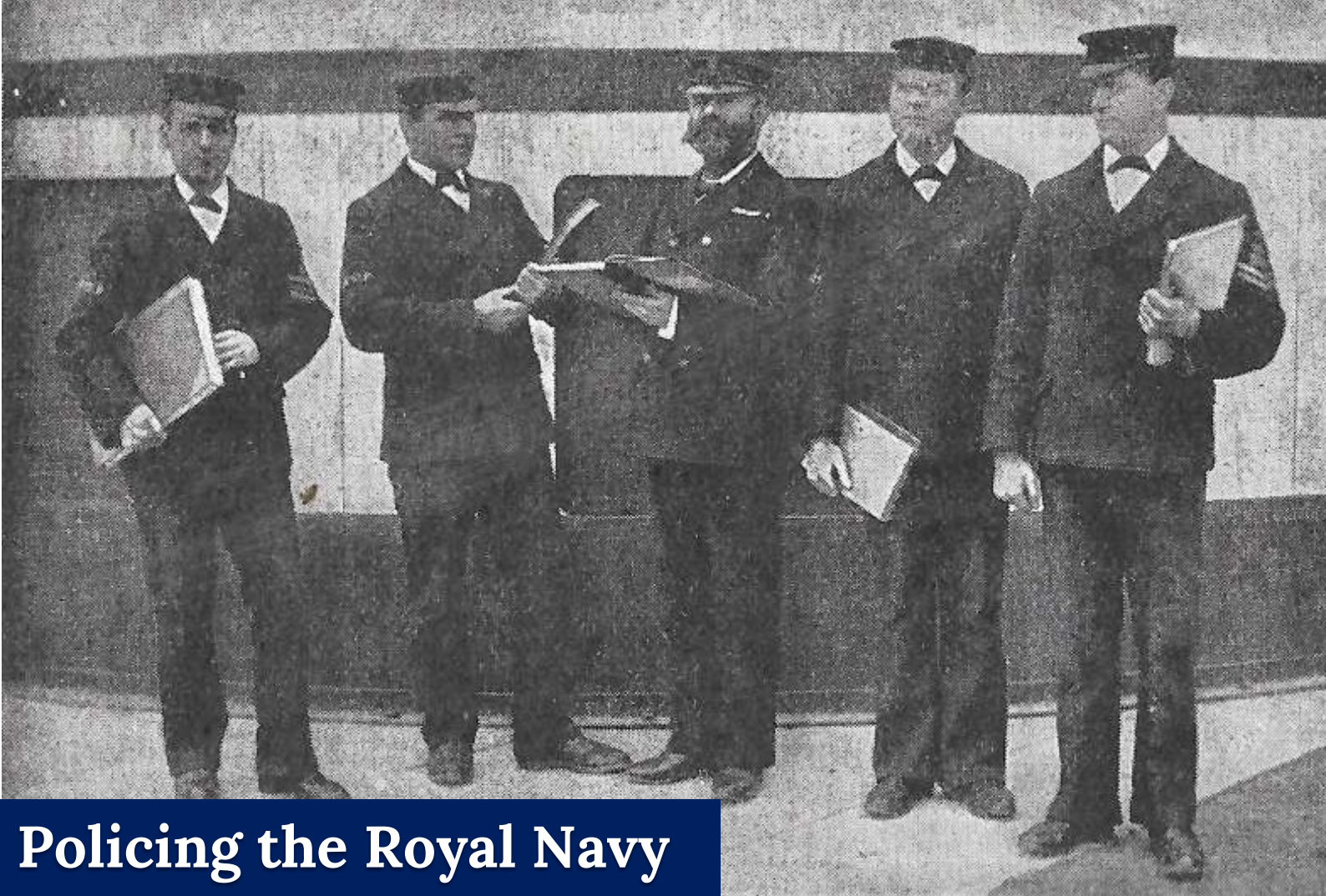
**Front cover image:** Chief Constable Richard Llewellyn Williams, a Welshman, of the Exeter City Police force (served 1901-1911). He was previously a superintendent in the Devon Constabulary 'E' Division (South Devon). (*Hall Family Collection*)

This free digital magazine is produced voluntarily by a member of Devon & Cornwall Police staff for educational purposes and for the general enjoyment of those with an interest in the history of policing in Devon, Cornwall, and the Isles of Scilly. It is not directly associated with Devon & Cornwall Police, the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner of Devon, Cornwall, and the Isles of Scilly, the Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall (abbreviated 'MOPIDAC', and informally, 'the force museum'), or any of the specialised or service police forces in the two counties. Every effort is made to avoid infringement of copyright and materials. If any unintentional infringement is made, the editor apologises unreservedly and will undertake to rectify the issue as soon as possible. Rights to the use and reproduction of photographs remain with respective copyright owners. Article text remains © Mark Rothwell, unless stated otherwise. You are free to share this magazine online, however, please do not edit, crop, or otherwise interfere with the content without permission. Quoted text for journalistic and academic purposes should be credited to *History Matters: The Devon & Cornwall Police History Magazine c/o Mark Rothwell*.

Email: [mark.rothwell3@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk](mailto:mark.rothwell3@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk)

Tel: 07305545399

Social media: @TheRothOfKhan (X/Twitter)



## Policing the Royal Navy

The group of smartly dressed men in the header image (© *The Royal Magazine 1900*) are a Master-At-Arms (centre) and corporals (naval policemen) aboard a Royal Navy ship in the year 1900. The need for discipline and crime prevention within Britain's sea arm has been necessary since the start of naval warfare, and in the early days a ship's master, who was the King/Queen's representative at sea, held great power over the fate of criminals and defaulters.

The modern Royal Navy, and its police, is comprised of highly trained personnel; men and women who have enlisted for service and have undergone rigorous instruction and discipline. Comparatively, the earliest naval ratings from the inception of the fleet in the 16<sup>th</sup> century were a mix of volunteers, impressed (forced) men, and those sentenced by magistrates to serve afloat as punishment. It naturally followed that dissent, malingering, and criminality manifested at sea and in port, requiring a strict regime for enforcing the will of the ship's captain.

At sea, a captain was his own master and therefore the state of discipline and severity of punishment was entirely exclusive to his ethics, morals, and personality. Thus, reprimands for offences, whether serious or trivial, were unevenly enforced across the fleet. Whereas one man may be

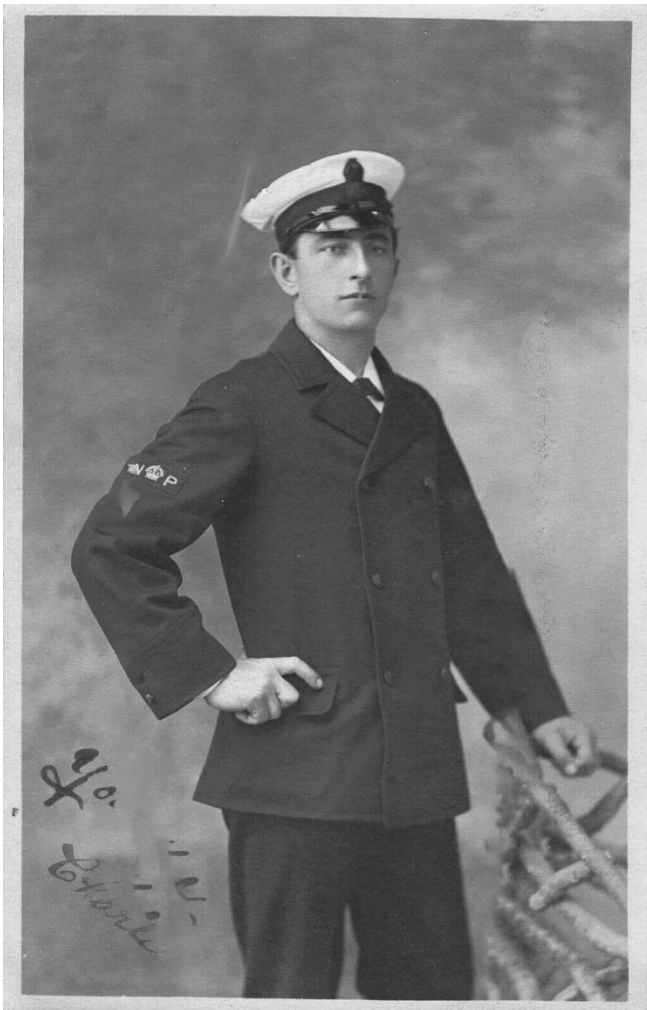
flogged or imprisoned for smuggling, another who committed the same indiscretion aboard another vessel may have his grog watered down or be forced to clean or repaint parts of the ship. A possibly apocryphal example of naval punishment from the 19<sup>th</sup> century speaks of a young sailor who upset a tin of paint on deck, the 'sentence' being to scrub the deck during dinner hour over several days using only the grog he so dearly cherished.

### *The MAAs*

Historically, a ship captain's rule was routinely enforced by an official known as Ship's Marshal. Under this man's command were a number of corporals who were effectively that ship's police force. In about 1699, the Ship's Marshal was abolished and replaced by a Master-At-Arms (MAA). Upon the discovery of a crime, the suspect was presented by the MAA to the captain for

questioning. It was common for the captain to encourage the accused to provide evidence of mitigation before punishment was decided. These events were typically carried out on 'punishment day' at six bells in the forenoon watch in the presence of most of the crew.

As the nature and makeup of the Royal Navy changed over the centuries, so did the work of the MAAs and corporals. Impressment into the navy was abolished in 1815 after the defeat of Napoleon, thereby closing the service to undesirable characters. A significant milestone in the meting out of punishment at sea was the passing of the *Naval Discipline Act 1866*. The law brought the naval criminal justice system in line with English law and limited the powers of captains to sentencing for summary offences only.



Naval policeman based in Plymouth, early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Note the letters 'NP' on the tunic sleeve. (eBay image).

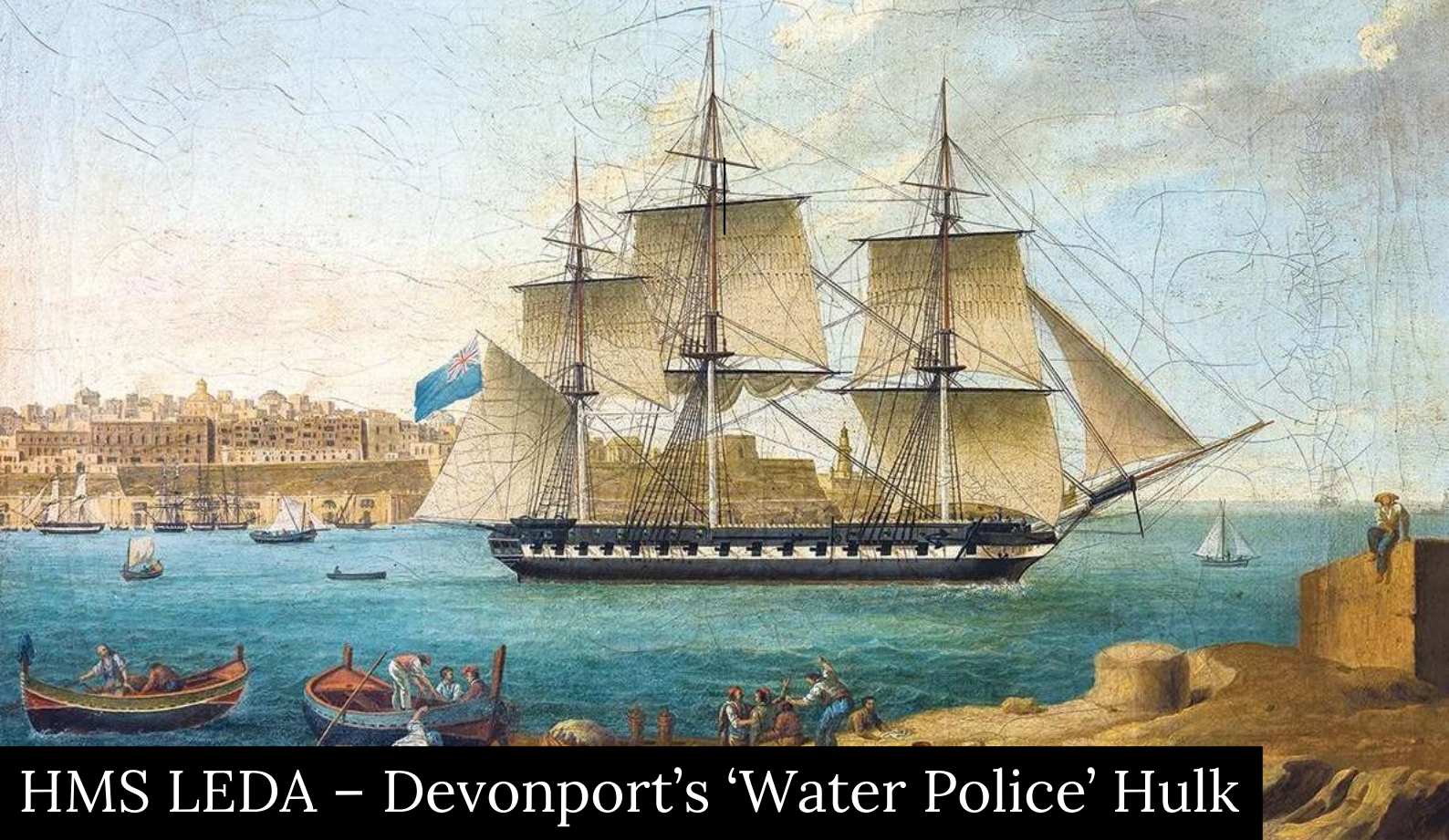
An important duty of the 19<sup>th</sup> century naval policemen was keeping a watchful eye on their comrades on shore leave. In the English ports and their adjoining conurbations, it was not unusual for the patrolling local bobbies to encounter their Royal Navy equivalents in their blue jackets. Monday mornings were typically eventful as the 9 o'clock patrol headed out to round up any stragglers who had perhaps over-watered themselves during weekend leave. Absentees were known as 'defaulters' and their names were entered in a 'defaulters book' which was presented to the MAA. Extraneous duties included security of the ship's stores and the lighting and extinguishing of the ship's gas lighting.

Members of the naval police were sailors first and foremost. To fall under the command of the MAA one must have served at least three years at sea and possess an exemplary record. The lowest rank of the naval police was 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Corporal and in 1900 the going rate was two shillings and fourpence a day. At six years' service in the rank of first class, the pay was three shillings and eightpence a day. Despite being de facto 'chief constable' aboard a ship, the MAA's pay was barely greater than a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Corporal; four shillings a day on the lowest scale, rising by sixpence a day for every year served to a maximum of 6 shillings a day.

### *The Modern Royal Navy Police*

In 1944, a naval provost organisation was formed on the recommendation of Col. D.H.C. Shepherd R.M., followed in 1945 by the establishment of a Royal Navy Regulating School at Beechwood Camp in Devon. It was a significant professionalisation of the naval police and until 2007 the force as a whole was known as the Royal Navy Regulating Branch (its members were accordingly known as 'regulators'). In 2007, the force was made subject of the *Armed Forces Act 2006* and was renamed 'Royal Navy Police'. Members have policing jurisdiction over service personnel and civilians subject to service discipline. In 2021, the force was granted maritime enforcement powers within English and Welsh territorial waters.





## HMS LEDA – Devonport’s ‘Water Police’ Hulk

**Continuing with the naval theme, this article takes a look at perhaps Devon’s most unusual police station – the hulk of the 46-gun fifth-rate Royal Navy frigate *HMS Leda*.**

The historic naval dockyards at Devonport, which have been around since the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, have been policed by various constabularies and in the present day are the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence Police. In 1863, the Metropolitan Police took over policing responsibility for the docks from the Admiralty-run ‘Dockyard Police Force’ that had been in place since 1834.

A year after the Met took over, they formed a Water Police Unit for general patrol of the dockyard environs. Whereas the land-based officers were housed in specially built homes on Cannon Street (married men) and in a tower block in the South Yard (single men), the water police lived and worked from the hulk of a Seringatam-Class frigate in the river opposite the Morice Yard. An 1865 map places *Leda* on the Devonport side of the Hamoaze roughly where the present day Torpoint ferry departs. The water policemen were known colloquially to their colleagues as ‘water rats’.

*HMS Leda* was laid down in 1824 at Pembroke Dockyard (Wales) and was launched in 1828. She was never actually commissioned, and her only known voyage was the journey to Devonport where she was destined to act as a reserve ship. She became the living and working space of the water police and their families in 1864 and was accordingly refitted with private living spaces and a communal kitchen and washing area. For the nautically-minded readers, *Leda* was 159ft long, 41ft wide, had a tonnage of 1,171, and a draught of 15ft (unloaded). In 1828, she was roofed over from the mainmast forward.

For her whole service as a police facility, *Leda* never moved. In the early years of the unit, the water police completed one tour of the harbour per watch by rowing boat. They also carried out foot patrols on the shores and waterfronts. In the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they used coal-powered steam pinnaces instead of rowing boats. The dockyard was ever-changing, and in the early 1900s the Keyham Yard was built. The new premises provided an opportunity for housing, and the water police relocated to a hut and their families into houses. *HMS Leda* was sold for scrap on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1906. Her figurehead was rescued and is currently on display in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. There are no known photographs of *HMS Leda*; the header image shows her sister ship *HMS Seringatam* at anchor in Valletta Harbour in Malta.



## Remembering Police Cadets Stephen Goddard and Kenneth Northey

A chance visit by a member of Devon & Cornwall Police staff to Luppitt Cemetery, near Honiton, generated an enquiry that quickly grew legs and revealed the tragic circumstances herein.

After the Second World War, entry into the Home Office constabularies was permissible at the age of 16 as non-warranted police cadets (or 'cadet clerks'). Many of the first candidates were those who had served in clerical police roles ('Junior Clerk Telephonists') during the war. Until 1960, those who joined at 16 suffered a mandatory pause to their careers to undertake National Service.

**Stephen Derek Goddard** and **Kenneth Northey**, both 16 years old, joined the Devon & Cornwall Constabulary cadets in 1968. Nick Perkins, who was in the same cohort as Goddard and Northey, recalls of the activities of the cadets:

*"...on a regular basis us cadets were ferried around. We were used to give updates on point to point events via walkie talkie for the benefit of attendees, where we were sited around the course. We would also deliver meals on wheels to old age pensioners for the council plus we would do other duties to assist the community. We were definitely returning from one such event when they sadly died".*

The final sentence in Mr Perkins' recollection thus points to the crux of this article. On 26<sup>th</sup> November 1968, Goddard and Northey were returning home from a community event. Northey was riding pillion with Goddard on Goddard's motorcycle; the other cadets were taken home by bus. On the Devon-Somerset border near Dunkeswell, they came upon a stationary lorry making deliveries. There was heavy fog, the vehicle's tailboard was down and obscuring the lights, and the lads struck the back of it. Goddard was killed instantly. Northey was seriously injured and was taken to East Reach Hospital in Taunton, where he later died.



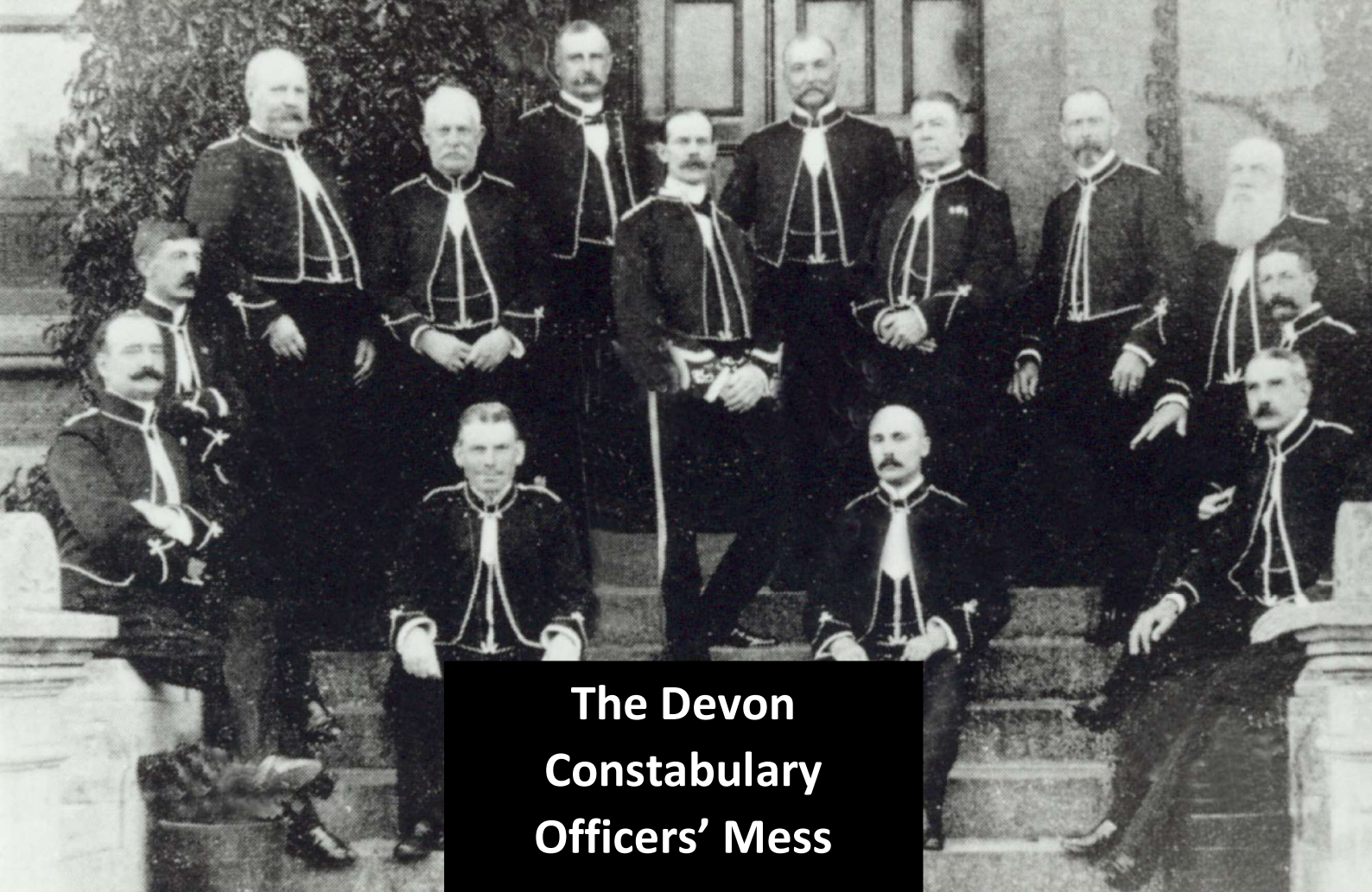
Western Daily Press 28 November 1968. (© BNA)



©C. Roberts

Enquiries are underway with the National Police Memorial Trust for formal recognition of these lads' service. The editor would like to thank Nick Perkins, C. Roberts, and Ch. Supt. Ian Drummond-Smith.





## The Devon Constabulary Officers' Mess

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, senior members of the Devon Constabulary enjoyed fine cuisine, smoke-filled rooms, and hearty conversations at the force's exclusive officers' mess. The club was formed in about 1878 and was funded from the pockets of the chief constable and divisional superintendents. Each paid 3 shillings a month into the kitty (increased to 5s in 1885) and this afforded two banquets per year and covered the travel expenses of the divisional supers to police HQ in Exeter.

The meals were cooked by a Mrs Powe, paid 10 shillings per event, and at least one waitress tended to the guests for 2 shillings a day. Later accounts show that Mrs Powe earned as much as 30 shillings for a day's work; more than a week's pay for a constable on the lowest scale! She was succeeded as head cook by a Mrs Parnell sometime in the 1890s, with Mrs Powe instead performing waiting duties thereafter. The accounts of the officers' mess show that the men dined finely on fish, poultry, and game. The drinks account for a late 1890s dinner shows the purchase of four bottles of sherry, four bottles of claret, two bottles of whisky, and one bottle of brandy. Additional funds were used for coffee, cigars, and decorative flowers. If there was any money left over after the dinner, it was divided equally by the number of guests and back into their pockets.

For reasons unknown, the club had a strict *no speeches* rule and originally only the chief constable, deputy chief constable, and the divisional superintendents could be members. The rules were relaxed in the late 1880s and male guests of other ranks were invited. It was not until 1956 that women were allowed to join. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, HQ fell out of use as a place of social gathering, and external venues, such as Exeter's Imperial Hotel, were used instead. Convention was broken in 1956 when, not only did the club see in its first female members, but Mr A. Denys Phillips (chairman of the Standing Joint Committee) stood up, raised his glass, and toasted to the force's centenary year of service. The historic breach of the *no speeches* rule seemed to pass everyone by.

The image in the article header shows the Chief Constable (F.R.C. Coleridge, stood between the two men sitting) and superintendents in their mess uniforms on the steps of Devon Constabulary HQ in the early 1900s. HQ was on New North Road next to where HMP Exeter now stands. The force relocated to Middlemoor in 1939.



## Remembering PC 190 Stephen CORTIS

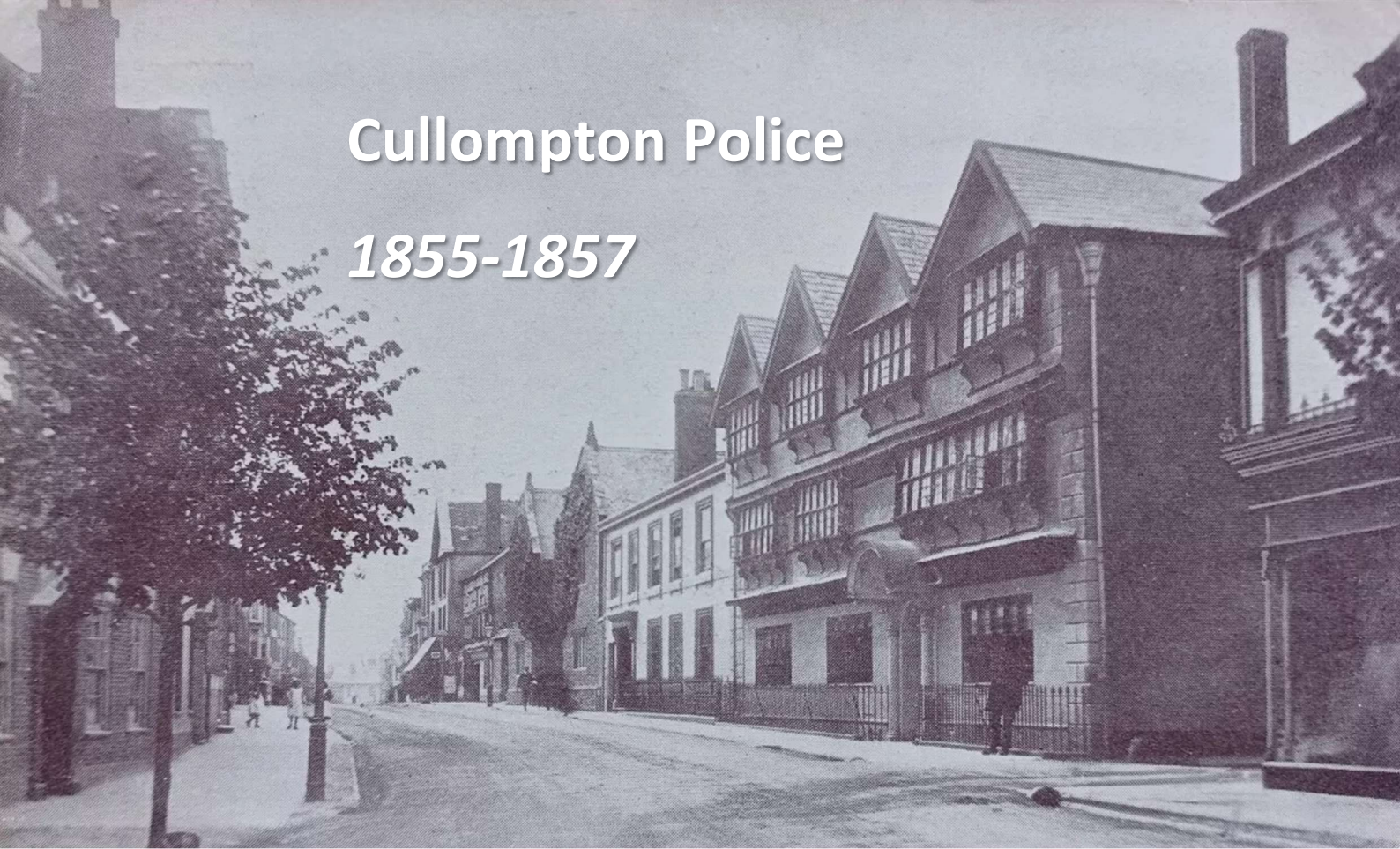


Tucked away behind heavily overgrown foliage in Mithian Churchyard, near St Agnes, is the Cortis family plot. Named on the sunken headstone is **PC 190 Stephen Cortis**, one of nine members of the Cornwall Constabulary who died as a consequence of the Great War (1914-1918). It is sometimes overlooked that many men died *after* Armistice Day from wounds and from disease contracted on the battlefield, and Cortis was one such statistic. Stephen Cortis was born in Tresamble, Cornwall, in 1897. His first job at the age of 14 was in a tin mine. He joined the Cornwall Constabulary on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1915 under constabulary number 190, but felt the pull of patriotism and joined the Coldstream Guards at Bodmin on 10<sup>th</sup> December under regimental number 18232. He was mobilised on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1916 and was promoted in France to Lance Corporal on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1917. On 9<sup>th</sup> October 1917, he was struck in the right arm by shrapnel at Flanders and was admitted to a field hospital for treatment. The battlefield nurses did an admirable job, however he suffered significant muscle tissue loss and he could not raise the arm or grip objects. He was sent home to England to recuperate, however, in a cruel twist, he had been exposed to tuberculosis on the battlefield and died from the disease, aged 22, at Wheal Betson on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1919. #NeverForgotten (Photo © Mark Rothwell)



# Cullompton Police

1855-1857



In the mid-1850s, there was no consistent system of police in Devon. Only 11 towns in the county had statutory constabularies (Barnstaple, Bideford, Dartmouth, Devonport, Exeter, Honiton, Plymouth, South Molton, Tiverton, Torrington, and Totnes) and there was not yet a countywide police force as the county authorities had rejected adopting the *Rural Constabulary Act* in 1839. Towns beyond those mentioned relied on unpaid parish constables. Cullompton was one such town, although in 1855 the local authorities there decided to take advantage of the *Parish Constables Act* 1849 which permitted the appointment of a paid police superintendent to take charge of the parish constables.

**Courtenay Davey**, a constable from the Tiverton Borough Police force, was appointed as the superintendent of police in Cullompton. In March of 1855, he brought up Parish Constable Tristram, from Holcombe Rogus, for interfering in a criminal investigation in relation to the rape of a woman. The constable thought it was acceptable to remove the suspect from custody and take him to the victim's family in Tiverton, where certain monetary demands were made of the suspect in exchange for the withdrawal of the complaint. The whole affair, described by the Cullompton magistrates as "a disgraceful transaction," compromised a capital offence and led to the constable's dismissal.

On 17<sup>th</sup> April 1856, a large quantity of barley was stolen from the malthouse of Mr Furze, of Uffculme, by James and Williams Watts. Superintendent Davey was informed and, after searching the Watts' home address and discovering more stolen property, located the men in the Holman Clavel public house over the border in Somerset. The Watts brothers were very large men, and fearing that he would be overpowered, Davey befriended them, bought them enough drinks to lull them into a merry state of co-operation, and then arrested them.

Davey was appointed as sergeant no.3 in the Devon Constabulary on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1857 and was removed to Exeter. He was reduced in rank to first class constable on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1871. He served in the county police for 18 years, 5 months, and 5 days, and was medically retired at the age of 55 on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1875 having developed infirmities which rendered him unable to carry out his duties satisfactorily. The chief constable of Devon granted him a pension which amounted to one-third of the pay of his rank.

# OFFICERS COMMENDED BY MI5

## IN CONNECTION WITH WORK CARRIED OUT DURING WW1

British police officers were called upon by MI5 during the Great War to undertake highly sensitive work in relation enemy 'aliens' and espionage. Much of what they did remains classified. In 1918, the head of MI5, Colonel Kell, wrote to chief constables and commended the work of certain officers in support of the war effort. The following police officers from Devon and Cornwall were accordingly recognised, as recorded in declassified documents held at The National Archives, document reference HO 45/10892/357291.

### **Cornwall Constabulary**

Deputy Chief Constable Richard Banfield, HQ  
Sergeant Hall, Falmouth  
Inspector Francis Warring  
Inspector Albert J. Davies  
Sergeant John W. Matthews  
Sergeant William J. Trythall

### **Devon Constabulary**

Chief Constable Herbert Reginald Vyvyan  
Superintendent Henry Crooke, Torquay  
Detective Inspector F.R. Hutchings, HQ  
Detective Constable James Elworthy, Torquay

### **Exeter City Police**

Chief Constable Arthur F. Nicholson  
Detective Inspector William Henry Hoyle

### **Plymouth Borough Police**

Chief Constable Herbert Hards Sanders  
Detective Superintendent Alfred William Martin  
Detective Sergeant William Cloke  
Detective Constable William Hutchings



# OffBeat

## Air Ministry Constabulary (1942-1964)



**This infrequent series looks at police and crime stories beyond Devon, Cornwall, and the Isles of Scilly. This month we look at Britain's first national aviation police service - the Air Ministry Constabulary.**

The Second World War saw the establishment of many new airstrips, aerodromes, and RAF Maintenance Units (MUs), and in 1939 the Air Ministry took over the policing arrangements at these locations. A central command structure for the ministry's police force came about in 1942 with the appointment of a police superintendent stationed at RAF Uxbridge in London. Around the same time, the body of special constables known as the Air Ministry Warders (formed as a result of the *Special Constables Act 1923*) was renamed the Air Ministry Constabulary; the first airports police service in the United Kingdom.

All chief warders were converted to inspectors, grade I warders to sergeants, and grade II warders to constables. Thousands of extra personnel were appointed in the Air Ministry Constabulary during and after the war and at its peak the force numbered around 3,530 nationally. Training was provided at RAF Debden, Essex, at the Air Ministry Constabulary Training School.

In appearance, the ministry constables resembled the ordinary police. They wore dark blue tunics and trousers, and flat caps featuring the force crest. Striped Metropolitan Police duty bands were worn on the tunic sleeves and each officer carried a whistle and iron restraints. In 1944, a plain clothes detective branch was formed called the Constabulary Investigation Branch. The

*William John Carter, an Air Ministry 'warder' appointed under the Special Constables Act 1923. (Harry Wynne Collection)*

small unit worked closely with the local county constabulary CIDs and their equivalents in the RAF Police. In 1945, a chief constable was appointed. The duties of the Air Ministry Constabulary were generally the security of Air Ministry establishments, in particular at RAF storage and maintenance depots where they worked alongside the RAF Police to safeguard the nation's material air assets.

### ***Policing of RAF Maintenance Units***

The memoirs of Molly Morris, a civilian Air Ministry worker at No.70 MU at RAF Woodcote, Oxfordshire, describe well the general duties and structure of Air Ministry Constabulary units at these locations. In 1942, there were twenty-seven constables at RAF Woodcote, male and female, in ranks from constable to inspector. They were headquartered in a Nissen Hut inside the main gates which was connected by telephone to two smaller huts at either end of the site.

The officers conducted both random and scheduled checks and searches on workers, and it was the preference of the constabulary for the women constables to search the women workers. The workers did not always wait around for the police to do their work, however. At clocking off time, workers were obliged to pass through the Search Room at Building No.65, submit to a search, and then make their way to the bus pickup point via a special exit. Sometimes, and particularly at night, the tired workers went straight to the buses, and the AMC constables would chase them down and insist that the workers return to the Search Room. Other duties included general security patrols, day and night, dealing with driving offences committed by RAF personnel and civilian workers, cycling offences, and clamping down on fraudulent overtime claims and travelling expenses.

Theft from RAF MUs, both by outside influences and service personnel, was a major problem. In March 1946, the theft of £3,760 of government property from No.61 MU at RAF Cranage, Cheshire, was discussed in the House of Commons after serious concerns were raised about security at the site. Sir Geoffrey de Freitas MP, the Secretary of State for Air, assured the house that the Air Ministry Constabulary and RAF Police (with service dogs) were stationed at the site and that since the thefts had been discovered, the locks on all the storage sheds had been changed!

### ***The AMC at Sensitive Non-Aviation Sites***

The Air Ministry Constabulary guarded some of Britain's most sensitive wartime installations and for this purpose were armed with pistols and Sten guns. One such location was the headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force (AEAF) which was hundreds of feet underground on the outskirts of London. Nobody could access AEAF HQ without showing a special pass signed by a member of the Air Staff. When King George VI and Prime Minister Churchill visited the facility on D-Day, the constables did not allow the men inside until both showed their passes!

Other secretive sites included the subterranean Air Ministry citadels; bomb-proof bunkers each with a war room, teleprinter, telephone exchange, and living quarters. One such site, codenamed 'Station Z', was located to the rear of His Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) on Headstone Drive, Wealdstone, Middlesex. The citadels, which were numerous and spread across the land, were intended as safe havens for VIPs during the Second World War. 'Z' was designated fallback site in the event the Air Ministry office at Whitehall was compromised and was continuously occupied by a body of AMC police officers and guards during the war.

After the war, 'Z' remained in use by the Air Ministry until around 1955. The aboveground offices were later used by the Home Office Directorate of Telecommunications for civil defence purposes and maintained the police and fire service radio network.

In 1941, the Air Ministry requisitioned Hughenden Manor in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, for use as a Survey Production Centre (SPC). The grand Victorian building was the former home of Prime



Minister Benjamin Disraeli (b.1804 d.1881). Here, under the codename 'Operation Hillside', the Air Ministry secretly produced detailed maps for RAF Bomber Command. Over one hundred skilled cartographers, artists, cartoonists, designers, and architects were employed at the location. The operation was so sensitive that it remained relatively unknown to historians until 2004. The SPC was well-guarded by a contingent of the Air Ministry Constabulary who ensured the security and integrity of the site and its staff.



*The SPC contingent of the Air Ministry Constabulary, with their winged cap insignia, stationed at Hughenden Manor, Buckinghamshire, during the Second World War. (Military Survey.org)*

A most interesting posting for AMC officers was the Rocket Propulsion Establishment at Westcott, Buckinghamshire. Established in 1946 by the Ministry of Supply, the site built and tested rocket engines based on captured V1 and V2 flying bombs under the supervision of former Nazi engineers. Such was the secrecy required, it did not appear on OS maps (but was marked on Air Ministry maps for pilots).

Two officers, Inspector Ernest Harvey and Police Constable Frank Winfield, served at Westcott for many years and received Long Service and Good Conduct Medals in 1953. During the ceremony, the facility superintendent commended the men for their resilience in enduring “irksome” conditions at Westcott, “...especially in the damp winters”.

AMC officers were also stationed at the Royal Aircraft Establishments (RAEs) in Farnborough, Hampshire, and in Bedford, Bedfordshire. As an aside, RAE Bedford was the location of the world's first grooved runway to prevent aquaplaning, and where British engineers invented carbon fibre.



On 8<sup>th</sup> September 1953, there was a fatal air crash at RAE Farnborough of a Bristol Sycamore helicopter. The pilot, Flight Lieutenant Kenneth John Hough, told onlookers before boarding the craft that he intended to fly it from the left-hand seat rather than the right, and that he was anticipating having to operate the controls the opposite way. Hough lost control of the helicopter a few seconds after take-off and was killed when his head impacted the control panel. Two passengers on board were thrown clear and survived. One of the witnesses was AMC Police Constable Alfred George Billows who could only watch helplessly as the disaster unfolded.

The Telecommunications Research Establishment (TRE), known as “...the most brilliant and successful of the English wartime research establishments”, had four sites each with an AMC contingent: Bawdsey (Suffolk), Dundee (Scotland), Worth Matravers (Dorset), and Malvern (Worcester). PC Walter Trim, based at Malvern, served in the AMC for 15 years. He was a veteran of the Great War with previous police service in the Devon Constabulary at Torquay, Exmouth, Dartmouth, and Bideford.

### ***First Chief Constable***

In 1946, Frank Joseph May OBE, formerly the chief constable of Swansea Borough Police, was appointed as chief constable of the force, the first to hold the rank. Concurrently, Squadron Leader D.F. Grierson MBE was appointed as the AMC's first deputy chief constable. In the same year, the Ministry of Civil Aviation was formed by Prime Minister Winston Churchill to promote ways of using aircraft for peaceful purposes and took over all aspects of civilian aviation from the Air Ministry. The AMC's mission after the reorganisation of 1946 was to safeguard public property and stores and execute the office of constable within any Air Ministry establishment.

### ***Secession from Civilian Airfields and RAF Maintenance Units***

The 1946 revision of the Air Ministry Constabulary's remit resulted two years later in the creation of an off-shoot – the Ministry of Civil Aviation Constabulary – which is covered in the next chapter of this book. Concurrent with these developments, the Air Ministry Constabulary suffered a significant reduction in manpower as they withdrew completely from civilian locations. Post-war labour shortages compelled the government to release all AMC officers who were appointed as ‘temporary constables’ so that they could return to their ordinary vocations.

The post-war manpower problems resulted in an exodus of the AMC, culminating in the complete withdrawal of the force from all RAF Maintenance Units in 1948. Thereafter, the protection of government military stores was assumed by the RAF Police, and the AMC existed only at military airfields, research sites, and manufactories. By this time, the force had diminished in strength to around 1,155 constables nationally. In the same year, the Air Ministry Constabulary appointed three men into the rank of Assistant Chief Constable, each responsible for one of the force's regions.

In 1951, an Assistant Chief Constable was appointed and placed in charge of the AMC facilities in London, Handforth (Cheshire), and Barnwood (Gloucester). The starting salary was £675, rather generous compared to the provincial forces.

### ***RAF Sites Subject to Foreign Lease***

RAF South Ruislip was leased to the United States Air Force (USAF) in 1949 and, although the Americans provided their own security force, there were AMC policemen stationed there for security and general crime prevention. The base was very much its own community and even had an American Express Bank on site.

On 15<sup>th</sup> December 1960, a gang of men trespassed on the base, broke into the bank, and cut the door off the safe with acetylene torches. As they sat and waited for the metal to cool, AMC Police



Constable John Leslie Bateman happened upon them and a violent fight ensued. The men failed to make off with any spoils but did cause injury to PC Bateman who was rescued by American colleagues and taken to the 7250<sup>th</sup> US Air Force Hospital for treatment.

### ***AMC Training School***

The constabulary, by virtue of its presence at Royal Air Force bases, shared a common interest with the Royal Air Force Police. Subsequently, when the RAF Police Training School relocated to RAF Debden in 1957, the opportunity was taken to align the schools of the two forces. Although both the RAF Police and Air Ministry Constabulary schools remained distinct from one another, close ties were kept between them, and they co-operated on matters of mutual interest. The close working relationship of the two forces was demonstrated by the original subtitle of *Provost Parade* (the RAF Police magazine), which was known for a short time as *The Official Journal of the Royal Air Force Police and the Air Ministry Constabulary*.

The Air Ministry Constabulary Training School later relocated to RAF Titchfield, Hampshire, under the supervision of Superintendent W.J. Jardine. When RAF Titchfield closed in 1958, the training school was relocated to RAF Stafford, Staffordshire.

### ***The Flying Policeman***

In 1956, Chief Superintendent W.H. Mercer, from the Lancashire Constabulary, became AMC chief constable. Perhaps due to his sporting prowess, Mercer was known in Lancashire as the “Flying Policeman”, and the press commented the aptness of this nickname now that he was the chief policeman of Britain’s aviation constabulary.

The recruitment of chief constable ranks in the AMC was not handled by the Air Ministry. Instead, the advertisement of chief officer jobs, interviewing, and selection was undertaken by the Civil Service Commission in London.

In 1961, Superintendent Stanley Wilkinson QPM, from the Worcestershire Constabulary, was appointed Assistant Chief Constable of No. 2 Area of the Air Ministry Constabulary, stationed at Quedgeley, Gloucester, and was responsible for the whole southwestern division of the force. He had served in Worcestershire for 31 years and reached the rank of superintendent in that force in 1955.

### ***Return to Policing RAF Maintenance Units***

The AMC resumed the policing of some RAF Maintenance Units in the 1960s. Under the chief constablenesship of Mr Mercer, the force numbered some 2,000 officers as the decade began.

### ***The AMC Becomes the AFDC***

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1964, the Air Ministry was absorbed into the newly established Ministry of Defence. As such, the Air Ministry Constabulary became the Air Force Department Constabulary (AFDC). The winged insignia of the old AMC gave way to a simpler design featuring the cypher of HM Queen Elizabeth II.

The 1964 alterations also affected the War Department Constabulary, which policed places such as the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich and became the Army Department Constabulary in that year. The Admiralty Constabulary (est.1949) survived a change of name but was set on a long and winding course that culminated in the three constabularies being merged to form the Ministry of Defence Police in 1971.

# MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

## 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**

## Coleridge's Emergency Baskets

Devon's **Chief Constable F.R.C. Coleridge** (served 1892-1907) was greatly concerned about the ability of the police to respond effectively to large scale catastrophes on land and at sea and insisted that baskets of emergency supplies were kept at coastal police stations. The baskets contained hot water bottles, brandy, and ingredients for making soup. One of Coleridge's baskets remained on police premises until the early 1950s at Salcombe.





This smart-looking group of Bobbies, pictured in about 1904, belonged to the dockyard division of the Metropolitan Police at Devonport. The Met had national responsibilities in respect of Admiralty dockyards, and Devonport was one such location until they were replaced by the Royal Marine Police Force in 1922. Against type for British bobbies, they are armed with Webley revolvers, a necessity at a time when there were serious concerns about the security of naval establishments.

## THE MUSEUM CAR

The Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall (MOPIDAC) has for many years had in its care a decommissioned Devon & Cornwall Police patrol car – a 1999/2000 Ford Escort, registration V168LDV. The vehicle, pictured below in 2013 (*Image from The Exeter Daily*), was retired in 2006 and lay neglected until it was acquired by the force museum. Being unused for so long, it had naturally fallen into a state of disrepair. Under the supervision of Brixham's PCSO Paul Martin, it was taken to South Devon College (Paignton) where it underwent an extensive restoration at the hands of a group of enthusiastic students (Jordan Brewster and Jack Cleaver). The project was completed with minimal outlay for the force or the museum, as local businesses contributed parts and materials. V168LDV in its restored state spent some time on display at I.G. MacCulloch & Sons (East Street, Okehampton) and later at Moretonhampstead Motor Museum before it ended up back in the possession of the museum. As at 2024, it is in much need of a second restoration, both aesthetically and mechanically. Museum volunteer Ralph Delbridge has taken on the grand task of bringing it back to its former glory. This particular example is believed to have been amongst the last batch of Ford Escorts delivered to the force and was used primarily in Plymouth and Ivybridge by the special constabulary.

