

## ***Kincardineshire Constabulary history***

by Geoff Marston

It's hard to believe that in its 107-year existence (1841-1949), Kincardineshire Constabulary's three Chiefs shared those years. The first two took on the office as Sergeants and the third as Inspector

Kincardineshire's County town since 1600 was Stonehaven. Its three Burghs were Banchory, Inverbervie and Laurencekirk. Kincardineshire (often referred to as The Mearns, which means The Stewartry) was a County on the North East coast, which was bordered by Angus in the south and Aberdeenshire or the River Dee in the north, a total of 380 square miles

### ***Alexander Weir***



Sergeant Alexander Weir became the first Kincardineshire Superintendent of Police in December 1841. He applied for the post whilst serving as Aberdeen City's *Day Patrole* Sergeant and Deputy to Superintendent Robert Barclay. Born in Banffshire in 1810, on his father's farm in Boharm (near Craigellachie), he left home in his late teens to seek a more adventurous life in the Army. After six years, he left with the rank of Sergeant and commenced his police career with the Dundee Harbour Police. Here again, he reached Sergeant and served until his Aberdeen appointment in early 1840. Whilst in office there, he was resident with his wife Elspet in our renowned Queen Street. On taking up his new Superintendentship at Stonehaven, he became resident at Bath Lodge, Fetteresso

His new Force consisted of 20 men, three of whom policed Stonehaven, the remainder being resident in the three Burghs and remaining 10 villages of Auchenblae, Drumlithie, Durris, Fettercairn, Gourdon, Johnshaven, Marykirk, Portlethen, St Cyrus and Torry. He also had his own horse. Sadly, much of the first four decades of its police documentation have been eradicated in time, apart from one story, which occurred in the early glow of the steam railway era

The line from Montrose to Stonehaven was completed in 1846. The next destination was, of course, Aberdeen and a large number of Irish Navvies were contracted for the job. Their construction ability was admirable but, newly paid and free from labours, they regularly caused fights with the Stonehaven locals, which were often reciprocated. As time went on, ill-feeling escalated into bitterness causing more conflict, but local police officers managed to keep control

However, all this came to a head on the afternoon of Saturday 1 January 1848 when about 200 Navvies gathered in the square. Well fuelled by alcohol, they swarmed through the streets, vandalising property and assaulting all in their path. Superintendent Weir and four Officers met the mob in Allardice Street at the now Queen's Hotel, but being so outnumbered were forced to withdraw to safety. As the afternoon went on, both police and locals re-grouped at the Carron Bridge where a confrontation with the rioters ensued. Over 20 locals were seriously injured and William Murray from Inverbervie later died after being bludgeoned. On hearing of the death, the mob finally dispersed about 9pm. For the next three weeks the 93<sup>rd</sup> Highland Division, Railway Police and Special Constables reinforced the town and eventually five persons were charged with mobbing and rioting, culpable homicide, malicious mischief and assault. Lord Cockburn sentenced one to 12

months, two got 18 months, and the one who struck Murray received 7 years' transportation. The fifth is still wanted



Superintendent Weir was titled Chief Constable in 1858 and in 1864 occupied the new Police Office within the County buildings shared with Council and Courts. (*Same building as now, but the office was at the opposite end*). During his 44 years in office, he was regarded as a careful and painstaking official known to be exemplary in conduct, considerate in

deed, courteous in manner and totally dedicated to his force. Life was cruel to him when his 29-year-old wife died in 1844, leaving him with his 2-year-old daughter Jane, who died aged only 16. He later remarried and had four sons and five daughters. In his 75<sup>th</sup> year he finally retired, due mainly to bad health, which made him the oldest police officer in Britain with over 50 years' continuous service. In view of his long and valued service, the County gifted him with £800, valued today at over £59,000. His remaining years were spent in Cameron Street Stonehaven where he died on 4 July 1894, aged 83

### *Charles George*



*Charles George - 1897*

In November 1869, Charles George joined Elginshire Constabulary, aged 21. After 16 years' service, he was Sergeant clerk and Chief's Assistant, when he became the new Kincardineshire Chief in November 1885. Like his predecessor, he too was the son of a farmer. He was born and grew up in Birnie, south of Elgin, just 14 miles north of Boharm where Chief Weir spent his early years

The Force strength had now totalled 18: one acting Inspector, at Stonehaven, a Sergeant at Banchory, one acting at Laurencekirk, 15 Constables and of course, the horse. At this time, officers wore standard rose-top helmets, eight-buttoned tunics with circled collar numbers and snake buckle belts. Only the Chief and Inspector wore the pill-box style forage cap, that is, until 1896 when the whole force adopted them

In 1891, the Aberdeen City boundary extension crossed the Dee into Kincardineshire to take in Torry. Of the two officers stationed there, one was temporarily housed to cover Nigg and Cove, whilst the other remained for a month to work with city officers before removing to Drumlithie. A new Police Station House was erected at Kirkhill, Nigg, at a cost of £230. Its first occupant in August 1893 was Constable Charles Gauld (later Inspector) but now its remains are well beneath the site of the present Nigg Office

Chief Constable George soon became well-known and respected and, albeit that he held high office, was quite willing to become part of day-to-day police duties. He was County Prosecutor of the Burgh Police Courts and attended there when possible, otherwise a sergeant or constable would deputise. In 1894, the opening of the Burgh Police Courts in Laurencekirk and Inverbervie, not only saved time and money in having to travel to Stonehaven, but also freed up more than half the cases prosecuted there by the police. His other responsibilities included Inspector of Weights and Measures and Contagious Diseases

In May 1893, at New Mains of Ury, Stonehaven, a cattleman shot two farm servants, killing one, George McCondach, aged 22, and seriously wounding the other. Mr George organized an immediate search, resulting in the assailant being traced hiding in the old Cowie churchyard. Tried for murder, the accused was sentenced to death, but on appeal, the charge was reduced to culpable homicide for which he was given penal servitude (*prison with hard labour*) for life. It appears this was the only recorded murder in the history of the Force

A case where the Chief took an active part occurred on 27 November 1907. A gang of six Glasgow pickpockets operating at the Stonehaven Feeing Market lifted a local man's wallet containing £27 (£1600 today) within the Stonehaven Hotel. Once reported, enquiries revealed the crooks were apparently heading south on foot. Realising they would eventually need to catch the train, Mr George telegraphed south-based officers to watch their railway stations, then took the evening train to Arbroath. At 7pm the train stopped at Drumlithie and, true to form, the suspects were awaiting its arrival. Boarding, they took seats in a compartment and were soon detained by Mr George until reaching Fordoun. There, assisted by railway officials and waiting officers, they were arrested and conveyed to Laurencekirk. After being searched, almost all the money was recovered

### *Heroic deeds*



*Bill George - 1904*

Mr George had one daughter and five sons, three of which followed their father's profession. William Charles (Bill) joined Kincardineshire in 1902, aged 19. In 1910, he was posted to Nigg and the following year involved in the dramatic rescue of an 18-year-old injured girl who had fallen over a 200 feet cliff at Cove. Rescue from the sea being impossible, he volunteered to be pulled up by ropes along with the girl in order to protect her, she being unconscious. The rescue was a total success but sadly the girl died some days later. Due to his great presence of mind, courage and endurance, he was awarded £10 from the Carnegie Hero Trust and a certificate, presented by the HMI, Major Ferguson. Additionally, in 1912 he was awarded the King's Police Medal by King George V at Buckingham Palace for his meritorious and courageous service

In January the following year, he was again involved in a remarkable sea rescue, when the Danish steamship SSG *Koch* was wrecked on rocks at Girdleness in a severe gale. Jumping into the raging surf, he rescued both a Coast Guard and member of the crew imminent danger of drowning and got them ashore. Seven of its 19 crew were drowned. Said to have shown *great pluck and gallantry* in saving life, he was again awarded money and certificates from the Carnegie Trust and Board of Trade. Further recognition was from the Danish Government in the form of an inscribed silver cup and finally by King George V again, adding a bar to his KPM, which must have made the George family exceedingly proud

Bill George was promoted Inverbervie Sergeant in 1916 and over the years carried this rank admirably. However, by 1923 at Banchory, drink appears to have had the upper-hand and two on-duty incidents got him first a written warning followed by a reduction in rank and move to Stonehaven. In the following year, which coincided with his father's retirement, another incident involving drink, coupled with neglect of duty, caused his compulsory resignation. Fortunately for the George family, this was demanded by Mr George's successor. Bill's latter years were spent as the local Inspector with Alexander's Buses and sadly, his death preceded that of his father

At the turn of the century, a senior constable earned about £1.35 per week, which equates to around £100 in today's money. The same constable retiring on a 30-year pension received £35 per annum, now about £2,600

As the years of the Force strolled through the first part of the century, life went by without any particular major incident. In 1902 the force, like others, modernised its uniform. It included the Broderick cap (today's style) with its own St Andrew's Cross badge and a five-buttoned high-necked tunic with two breast pockets. In 1915, 560 persons were apprehended or cited as opposed to 502 in 1914. The increase was apparently due to trouble initiated by Navvies again, now building the Invercanny waterworks at Banchory. Four men fought for King and Country during the 1914-18 war and all returned to force. The only loss during that period was in September 1918, when Constable John Anderson of Gourdon died of appendicitis in Montrose Infirmary



In 1919, Charles George completed his 50 years' police service. In recognition of this, he was awarded the King's Police Medal by the Lord Lieutenant. In 1920, his service was again recognised by a gift in silver along with an illuminated address from the Chief Constables' (Scotland) Club' (forerunner of ACPOS). For 13 years as Secretary, he had contributed much to the improvement of the conditions of service. He retired in his 54<sup>th</sup> Police year in May 1924, aged 75. During his time in Stonehaven, he became a renowned, esteemed and dependable part of Kincardineshire society. His retirement years were as full as his working ones, involved with Church, community, sporting facility matters and Justice of the Peace. He died at his home, Millbirnie, Evan Street, Stonehaven on 11 September 1937, aged 89. His funeral, one of the largest recalled in Stonehaven, truly reflected his most memorable character

### ***Robert Mitchell***

Robert Mitchell was born in Alford in 1883 and after some years as a farm servant, joined Aberdeenshire Constabulary in 1902, aged 19. In 1907, he secured a position on the clerical staff of Ayr Burgh Police and in 1908 was promoted Office Sergeant. Later gaining experience in detective duties, he was promoted uniformed Inspector. In 1924, from a list of 36 applicants, he was elected Chief Constable of Kincardineshire, aged 42



*Robert Mitchell - 1924*

The first General Order put out by Mr Mitchell was in respect of a County horse census requested by the authorities. Who better, to hand out and collect the relevant forms than the local Bobby! His second was to ensure each officer got one clear rest day at least each fortnight. With his nearest colleague covering his beat, he was allowed to be absent from his station, from 6am to 12 midnight if he so wished

Since the 1890s, the rural officer had been able to cover the more distant areas by wheels and pedals (sometimes in excess of 20 miles a day), but now the new mechanised era had arrived and was summed up in the Chief's 13<sup>th</sup> GO: *A fairly large proportion of the Force use motor cycles and while it is very gratifying to the CC to know that these progressive and up-to-date methods exist, he would like to make it clear that on no account must the services of a motorcycle be requisitioned by a Constable on ordinary patrol duty throughout his district. It is*

*impossible for a police officer to give that careful attention and scrutiny necessary to matters on his beat while flashing past on a motor bicycle. While on patrol duty the ordinary pedal cycle is the proper thing*

### ***Progress illuminates the Force***

He was quite right in the circumstances and wanted to keep that personal touch with his public. Smartness, too, was his forte and in October 1926 *breeches and puttees* replaced trousers (*see photograph*) and remained standard uniform until May 1939. In no circumstances was he about to allow his small force to become a backwater, far from it. Forward thinking from the start caused him to seize every opportunity he could to progress his force by each year's improved technology



*CC Robert Mitchell and officers escort the funeral cortege of Col Davidson along St Fitticks Road, Balnagask, 1932*

This started in the late twenties when he purchased both a patrol car and motorcycle with sidecar. Obviously the roads north and south played a major part in becoming wheeled for emergencies. By 1934, the motorcycle was replaced by a 12hp Sports model 4-seater Hillman Minx and in 1937 a General Purpose van was added to the ranks. Both vehicles were fitted with radio receiver sets, this being through Mr Mitchell's professional relationship with Aberdeen's Chief, James McConnach, coupled with Ted Ingram's wizard radio technology on their vehicles.

Any call concerning Kincardineshire could now be transmitted there from Aberdeen

Staying in Aberdeen, remember the removal of Torry from the County in 1891? Well, in 1930, more land was City claimed, causing the loss of the Bridge of Dee and Nigg Stations. In view of this, new County Stations were erected at Ardoe, Charleston, Cammachmore and Fettercairn

Before present-day Welfare Officers, Robert Mitchell paved the way in this respect. Determined to have his men and their families well-housed, he regularly visited the families at their stations, particularly speaking to the wives who cleaned and administered the stations in their husbands' absence. Since the mid-1920s all 12 stations had been fitted with exchange/telephones, but to ease the burden on the wives, public phones were fitted to main road stations for use when the officer was occupied elsewhere

Changes in uniform occurred again when the oval shaped *Semper Vigilo* badge became the new cap badge in 1932. The diced band or *Sillitoe tartan*, however, was not added until May 1935, when first worn at George V's Jubilee Celebrations. Finally in 1944, the shoulder crowns were removed along with the ornate KC and replaced by the word *Kincardine*. Collar crowns for Sergeants were changed to the similar shaped County's coat of arms. That same year, all police badges of ranks were standardised in Scotland

### ***Some Force firsts!***

Taking into consideration the advancements of skills within all police forces, a Photographic and Fingerprints department was established in 1938. HQ Sergeant James Robertson became first Detective Sergeant in charge of Special Investigations from May 1942. In January 1947, Sergeant William J. Patterson took charge of the newly-formed Traffic Department, with Traffic Constables Frank McKay and George Dow. Vehicles in use at this time were a Ford V8 saloon, MG Midget 2-seater and Morris van. A new Humber Super Snipe replaced the Ford and a new model MG, the old

Staying with firsts, the HQ Clerkess from 1938, Agnes Fyfe, became Kincardineshire's first and only policewoman in April 1944 and carried out appropriate duties at Stonehaven. Also in 1938 was the first force officer to attend the new compulsory 3-month probationer course, then at the Glasgow Training School. This officer, William Alexander Glennie, was to be more remembered for his heroic rescue attempts of a rock fisher who fell into the sea at Bowden's Point, Stonehaven, in September 1945. Lowered into the water, he made several attempts at rescue. Bruised and bleeding, he finally managed to secure a grappling iron to the fisher's belt. When hauled aloft by rescuers, the fisher was but four feet from helping hands when his belt snapped and finally he became victim to the sea. For his courageous attempts at rescue, he was awarded the Carnegie Hero Trust medal, £25 (£700 today) and the King's Police Medal for Bravery, which he received at Buckingham Palace from King George VI

From 1890-1949, only five Inspectors/Deputy Chiefs held office, namely James Farquharson, James Gibson, James Tait, William F Thorn and Frederick M Shepherd, the post previously being secured by a Sergeant and, latterly, acting Inspector. As the doors of the force closed, the Chief's establishment was Inspector/DCC, four Sergeants, one Detective Sergeant, 20 Constables and a Clerkess, a total of 28. However, I have not mentioned that there were also at hand a total of 127 Special Constables available for duties if required, many of whom had many years of faithful service

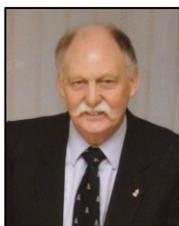


*Robert Mitchell - 1949*

The Force presented Chief Constable Robert Mitchell with a gold wristwatch, suitably inscribed, before he retired from office on 15 May 1949 (the day before Scottish North East Counties came into being). His last General Order, 94, thanked the members and their wives *for their loyal and efficient service so willingly and ungrudgingly rendered at all times*

Robert Mitchell had two hard acts to follow, but in keeping with his predecessors, he certainly made the Kincardineshire *hat trick*. He, too, retired to Stonehaven and became a JP. He died aged 80 on 27 September 1963

*A special thank you to ex-Insp Doug Smith ACP (son of the late Sgt Andrew Smith, Kincardineshire Constabulary), for bringing to light information never before documented*



*Geoff Marston is a retired Constable of Grampian Police and currently volunteer Curator for Police Scotland at Aberdeen in respect of the old North East Scotland forces*