

SIR JOHN DUNNE, CHIEF CONSTABLE E
XTRAORDINAIRE...1825-1906

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.....I wonder how many people have actually heard the name John Dunne, and more importantly associate him with the history of policing in this country? Not too many I guess. Yet John Dunne, later to become Sir John Dunne was to have an important part in policing throughout the Victoria era, with many of his ideas still being used to this day.

John Dunne was born on the 12th February 1825, and was the son of William Dunne of Boley, Queen's County and Julia Dunne. According to Dod's Peerage of 1900 we also learn that he was educated at Montabuan and Dublin. In truth John originated from more humble beginnings, his father managed a small Woollen Mill in Boley, Southern Ireland, and presumably he was expected to follow in his father's footsteps, so we will probably never know why he chose to leave his middle class home in 1839 and embark on an adventure which would see him joining the Manchester Borough Police at just 14. What we later learn is that even at just 14 the young Dunne was never to be satisfied with the life of a lowly constable and would have been considering his future career options. For example when completing his application form for the post of constable with Manchester police he stated that he was far older than his fourteen years, that he came from a well-known and long established Irish family, with ancestors which included at least two generals, MP's, High Sheriff's and Bishops; that he had been educated at a private school in Montabuan, after which he had completed his education at Dublin University, all of which was blatantly untrue....especially when you are declaring as he did later that he was actually a police constable at the same time he was ostensibly furthering his education in Dublin. What is quite clear is that within two years Dunne was realising that perhaps Manchester was not the best of places to be. Whatever his reason, Dunne on the 20th August 1842 was to find himself joining the ranks of the Essex Constabulary as PC 150 which was then under the leadership of Captain McHardy, who fortunately for Dunne had the reputation of recognising and nurturing possible senior officers. It was McHardy who first saw the potential in Dunne and by the time he was 21 he had received his first promotion...to Inspector, though... as it turned out, this new position was only to last two years. A move to Bath Constabulary followed, for they were looking for an Inspector to be appointed 'Relieving Officer for Vagrants', and though for Dunne this would prove to be a short term appointment it was a move nevertheless which would affect his career for the rest of his life...especially so where vagrants were concerned. One year later, in October of 1850, he was on the move again. This time it was to take him to Bearsted in Kent, where he was appointed Superintending Constable. However, thanks to both constant interference by the Kent County Watch Committee along with the fact that Norwich City Police were anxious to appoint a new chief officer to replace the current incumbent, Dunne was quickly on the move again...Like Kent, this posting too was to prove relatively short term, though it was not without incident, for in two short years he did more to develop and reform policing than his predecessor had done in almost twelve. Notwithstanding the need to replace most of the existing police officers, who he stated were '*rotten to the core*' he also had to contend with a Watch Committee and a group of magistrates who in the main owned and ran the hundreds of drinking houses across the city and were certainly not going to accept prosecutions against their licensed premises. It was clear that his position was untenable and thus destined to be short-lived. It was around this time...early 1853, that Dunne's career was to go one further step up the ladder, when along with other senior police officers he was

ordered by the coalition government to report his views on policing to a Select Committee which we now know would eventually lead to the County and Borough Police Act of 1856. All the while he was spending time in Parliament things were moving continually upwards for Dunne, for he received a letter advising him that out of a total of 70 applicants he had been accepted as Newcastle's Chief Constable, and as before he was to bring the force into an acceptable position. Dunne's 'baptism of fire' in Newcastle, would have been the Great Fire of Newcastle and Gateshead which started on the 6th October 1854 just three months after he had taken up the reins of the new force. A total of 53 people died that night and some 500 people were injured. Dunne himself was lucky to escape with his life, for during one horrific explosion a young army officer and a 25 year old architect standing alongside him were both blown to smithereens. The years 1856/7 were to herald in a number of new police forces across the country and the newly formed Cumberland and Westmorland Constabularies were but two of them. At a meeting of both these counties Selection Committees in 1856 they had, somewhat unusually, both opted for having one chief constable to head up their two forces. Dunne upon hearing of this immediately applied for the position and would have been surprised to learn that he had been offered the job without the need for an interview and subsequent short-list. Once again, regardless of lack of education, age, and humble origins he was selected out of 120 applicants. However, this time round things were going to be different. No short term career moves anymore, this was to be a post which was to last until his retirement in 1902. There was just one little hiccup when he did seriously consider leaving the joint forces, and that was in 1865 when he applied for...and was short-listed.... for the post of Chief Constable of Gloucestershire. He would probably have got the job too if it hadn't been for the fact that a certain Captain Henry Christian had also applied for it, and as he had recently been the Captain of the Royal Yacht, and Queen Victoria herself had given him a glowing reference.....guess who got appointed? It is perhaps indicative of his character when we learn that among Dunne's first jobs with the Cumberland and Westmorland Police was the writing of what was possibly the first training and instruction book for police officers, along with the introduction of Merit Badges, plus interestingly, calling all policemen under his command, regardless of rank... 'officers'...something which is normal these days...but not in the mid 1850's. This was in addition to personally selecting his first police force of 74 men to patrol a population of close on 270,000 people, over an area of 1.5 million acres..... meaning that each officer had to patrol some 20,270 acres each...daily!.... His was to be an interesting, exciting and enjoyable police career in the new force encompassing all sections of the predominantly rural community and at times stretching his skills to the extreme, particularly with his involvement in numerous murder trials, in which he was often to leave his own mark on the case. One trial for example, that of William Charlton in 1861, came to fruition almost solely on a plaster cast footprint of the suspect...an idea introduced by Dunne; another was the murder trial of George Cass in 1862 when Dunne was the only one to notice that this was not a case of suicide as everyone else insisted, but one of murder, as the victim Ann Sewell was right-handed and the knife was clearly shown to be held in the victim's left hand. Instances of cattle disease took up a lot of his time for there were many serious outbreaks during this era, and Cumbria was no exception. For this problem Dunne developed what were then novel counter measures which involved the slaughter, confinement and disinfection of cattle...methods which following discussion in the Houses of Parliament, were quickly used nationwide not just for swine-fever but to combat other contagious animal diseases ...

and are still in use to this day. Another of his innovations was his procedure for police control of tramping vagrants which drastically cut the number of associated crimes. So insistent was he that this was the root cause of all crimes, he even persuaded Parliament that this was indeed the case. It would be true to say that Dunne by this time was highly regarded in Parliament not just for his views on cattle disease and vagrancy on which he was now considered to be an expert, but over the years he had submitted proposals on the Game Laws, which changed the laws on poaching significantly.....as well as being instrumental in the setting up of the Licensing Act of 1872, and having a degree of input in the Police Superannuation Act of 1875, the Reformatory and Industrial Schools Act of 1866.....along with several other Acts of public interest. From a financial point of view, Dunne, by 1868 was never an especially rich man, his salary was £300 per annum, and he was living in bachelor accommodation. However his marriage to Mary Barnes at age 43 that year was to change his life and fortunes forever. Mary came from a very wealthy family, her father was a local JP and surgeon... namely Dr Thomas Barnes of Bunkers Hill, Carlisle, and also Tring Park in Hertfordshire. Her dowry included valuable property which she had inherited just three years earlier following the death of her uncle. In addition Mary's grandfather was a certain John Ismay, of White Star Line fame, and he too was to bequeath Mary a substantial amount of money. This new wealth was further increased just four years later when his wife inherited the Manor of Brunstrux, In Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire, a not insubstantial property, following the death of her father. His career not only culminated in his attendance at Buckingham Palace in 1897 to be invested Knight Bachelor, but also this same year his career was recognised by his peers when the Lord Lieutenant of Cumberland conferred upon Dunne the appointment of Deputy Lieutenant of Cumberland. Later that year, somewhat unusually, he was also appointed a Senior Justice of the Peace for Carlisle. 1897 being the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, Dunne was also honoured to be asked to make a presentation to Her Majesty on behalf of the Police of England and Wales, he being recognised as the most senior police officer in the country. Earlier in the year he had also chaired meetings of the police security committee... planning arrangements for the Diamond Jubilee celebrations

Dunne finally retired on the 31st August 1902, aged 77. He had been a policeman in total for 63 years, 52 of them as a chief constable...he was arguably not only the youngest police officer ever when he joined in 1839, as well as being the youngest chief constable on record at just 25 years of age, but additionally the longest serving when he retired...not overlooking the little matter of him heading up two police forces at the same time. For the next four years he concentrated his efforts on being a magistrate along with the day to day running of his farms and his various properties. He died on the 5th January 1906, aged 80, at his home at Eden Mount, Wetherall, and was buried in a local cemetery. In his will published shortly afterwards, he left the equivalent today of £8.5 million pounds...not bad for a policeman.

The Murder of a Tudor Constable

April 22nd 1507 - 28th January 1547 is a wide span of time but this is the date of a Star Chamber document about the murder of an Uxbridge policeman in the National Archives at Kew. Unfortunately the date cannot be narrowed down further except from

the phrase '26th day in October' and details of a trial - if there was one - have not been found.

The document, a single piece of parchment, is an appeal to the King, almost certainly Henry VIII, by Eleanor Clynton, late the wife of 'Richard Clynton, Kings constable of Peace of the towne of Woxbridge' (this is an old spelling for Uxbridge but might be a recent transcriber suggested Weybridge). Richard Clynton was killed on duty by a number of men in concert with the Bailiff of Colham Manor. Colham Manor is an area now in the London Borough of Hillingdon first mentioned in 1086 as a significant agricultural part of Middlesex. Hillingdon was the other local manor but Uxbridge gradually became the more important town and market: Colham in local usage is now limited to a green, some streets, a recently demolished office 'Colham House' and a school. consisting of about four hundred closely written words in Tudor English it is clear that Richard Clynton was standing at his own gate when the attackers approached, was murdered by six persons gathered together and armed 'with hawkberkes, billies, swords and other weapons'. They made 'a great assault' and 'gave him deadly wounds, murdering and slaying him in his own house.' However the parchment cannot be read end to end and there are no clues about the background to the incident, what happened to the offenders or his widow. After that phrase the parchment is hardly legible but the 'great horror of the inhabitants' of Uxbridge is mentioned and it continues that 'all (the attackers) went to the house of Richard Colyn, drank and made joyous as though they had done a good deed'. Specifically named and involved are John Colrand of Colham, Bailiff to the Lord of the Manor of Colham, James Thomason, yeoman of Uxbridge, Henry Wolff of Uxbridge, Henry Longfellow (Longrader?) tailor of Uxbridge, Thomas Rayner of Colham husbandmen, Richard Knottying and others to the number of (something). After the murder someone spoke to John Colrand, 'Alas may what hast thou slay this man (something) but he replied 'I shall kill .. of them' which raises the possibility the criminals involved were an unsavoury group perhaps with a longstanding dislike of constables. The concluding sentences are an appeal by Eleanor Clynton 'may it please your highness to cause the said murderers to be sent for' and 'a promise to daily pray to God for the prosperity of your most noble Lord'. What happened then is a mystery; one can only hope there was a trial and some provision for Eleanor.

Policing at that time was organised by the parishes and the position of constable was held by a local person, ideally of some standing, as an unpaid role for one year. The parish constable was responsible for organising local watchmen and it had become a duty that was often avoided not sought. In the earliest written history of Uxbridge by Redford and Riches, they refer to three local citizens 7 paying £5 each to the Parish Vestry on the 29th April 1747 to be spent on three apprenticeships for local lads. In return the Vestry granted them life exemption from the duty of constable. From all this one might conclude Richard Clynton was doing the job, perhaps unwillingly, but to the best of his ability. However like the aftermath of the murder we will probably never know any more.

Paul Dew 8th March 2013

Sources

National Archives - Court of Star Chamber Proceedings Henry VIII Bundle XIX 22nd April 1509 - 28th January 1547. Ref STAC 2/19/63

Redford and Riches - History of Uxbridge

Foul Murders and Suspicious Deeds Around Uxbridge - Jonathon Oates

Victoria History of Middlesex Vol 4 page 84

(This refers to Uxbridge; modern transcribers have suggested Weybridge, my view is proximity to Colham Manor implies Uxbridge).

Acknowledgements

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Collection: Records of the Court of Star Chamber and of other courts

Date range: 22 April 1509 - 28 January 1547

Reference: STAC 2/19/63

Subjects: Crime, Litigation Court of Star Chamber: Proceedings, Henry VIII. BUNDLE XIX. PLAINTIFF: Eleanor Clynton DEFENDANT:

Richard Colyn, John Colrand, and others PLACE OR SUBJECT: Murder of Richard Clynton, constable of Uxbridge COUNTY: Middlesex