

A PUZZLE SOLVED!

Notes on a Fire Engine Photograph

by

Ralph B. Lindley



This photograph was received from John Field of York in January 2005, and it shows a Sergeant and five Constables with the collar numbers 101 (Sergeant), 102, 103, 104, 105 and 106, on a motorised fire appliance outside a fire station. He had been told that it was of the Leeds City Police Fire Brigade circa 1916.

There are no collar badges on their uniforms and the shield in the centre of their belt plates was originally thought to be something like the coats of arms of York City or Worcester City or similar. The cap badge seemed to have a very small crown, with the centre device being either a coat of arms or crossed fire axes.

However, the number plate on the front of the fire engine has the letter 'U' on it, and at the time, this was the registration mark for Leeds, and on taking the photograph out of the cellophane cover and removing the modern mount over the front, I discovered the following lettering 'Chas. R. H. Pickard, Briggate Chambers, Kirkgate, Leeds'. So this tended to confirm that the photograph could indeed be that of the Leeds City Police Fire Brigade.

On checking the Leeds City Police Centenary booklet issued in 1936, I found that the force purchased a motor fire engine in 1910, but that they also continued to have horse drawn engines until 1923. Also in this booklet, is a photograph of a fire engine 'turning out' from the Fire Station, and it is the same building as the one in the photograph received from John Field. The booklet also states that about 1877, the Fire Station was in the Corn Exchange, but it moved to Park Street in 1883, and was still there at the time the booklet was published in 1936. The Force Headquarters was also located in this area.



The Leeds City Police History published in 1974 states that by December 1914, there were 1,086 persons who had enrolled as Special Constables. On page seventy of the history it states in '1916 the strength of Leeds 'Specials' was 2,086 with an Auxiliary Fire Brigade of 97 officers and men'. During the First World War, a tribute was paid to the Special Constables whose 'services rendered possible the efficient policing of the City'.

On looking closer at the cap badge worn by the Sergeant, one can see what appear to be small chevrons underneath, and this is similar to the badges worn by Sergeants in the Leeds Special Constabulary during the First World War, mainly as an off duty lapel badge worn while in civilian clothes to avoid them being offered a white feather.

The Auxiliary Fire Brigade had their own off duty lapel badge and this had crossed axes on it and a Constable's one is shown below, the date being 1915.



So the puzzle is solved. It appears that the men shown on the fire engine are members of the Auxiliary Fire Brigade of Leeds City Police and who were enrolled as members of the Special Constabulary. To make them look different from the regular officers or members of the Police Reserve, they were given their own badge to wear on their caps, and did not wear the collar badge on their uniforms but had one on their belt clasps instead.

It is just a pity that the identities of the men are not known at the present time.

PLAGUE, PESTILENCE AND POLICEMEN

by

Paul Dew

The Great Plague of 1665 was by far the worst outbreak in England for over 300 years, but although there are excellent contemporary records of life in London, the law enforcement aspects are usually overlooked. In fact, at least one Constable and a City of London official watchmen died whilst carrying out their duties.

At that time there was a rudimentary system of policing both in the City and the surrounding parishes. Each Ward in the City employed watchmen to patrol the streets at night, and in Holborn there were parish constables. The Great Plague placed much more pressure on the local authorities because in the early days attempts were made to prevent the spread of illness by confining victims and their family at home.

Within the City area, the house of any victim was sealed, then guarded by watchmen with sharpened halberds. Inevitably other family members resented being locked in, and attempts were made to escape, and in some cases, by attacking the watchmen. In one case, the watchmen was 'blown up with gunpowder and burned dreadfully; and while he made hideous cries the family were able to get out of the windows leaving two victims behind'. The other members of the family fled and kept out of the way until the plague abated. They then returned, but as nothing could be proved, action against them was impossible. The name of this watchman who almost certainly died of his burns has not - to date - been found.

The second known member of the law enforcement community to die was John Green, Constable of High Holborn. He was described as very vigilant and diligent in the performance of his office. As required by the parish authorities, he made returns to the justices twice a week listing the houses of victims he had visited and how they were provided for. He was in fact so diligent, that when in turn he died, the parish owed him £55 (£4,250 today - *Editor*), which he had paid from his own pocket for the care of the victims.

Sources :

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Acknowledgements :

Catharine Arnold