

Willoughby George Fox, Chief Constable of Derbyshire, 6 January 1857 - 5 April 1873

by Terrence Johnson and Mike Baker



Willoughby George Fox was born in Co Tyrone, Ireland, in 1826, the son of Rev John James Fox. At the age of nineteen, he joined the *father* of the British Police, the Irish Constabulary, rising from Officer Cadet through the ranks to become a 2nd class Sub-Inspector in April 1850. He trained for one month at Phoenix Park in Dublin before promotion to 3rd class Sub-Inspector, serving in Blessington, Carrick-on-Shannon, Ballina and completing his service at Kildare. Ireland was going through troubled times during this period, with high unemployment and starvation because of the potato famine. It was reported in a local newspaper at the time that Sub-Inspector Fox had dealt with a number of starvation deaths and been in charge of a section of police officers escorting a tax collector who had subsequently been attacked by a rioting mob. Sub-Inspector Fox's career in the Irish Constabulary was not without a couple of unfavourable

records. In February 1848, he was admonished for gross extravagance: it would appear he spent far too much money travelling *in style* in a carriage whilst on duty

In the mid-1850s, police officers in *established* forces who were looking to advance their career were given a great advantage with the creation of a number of county police forces in Great Britain. In 1856, the Derbyshire Standing Joint Committee advertised for a suitably qualified person to command their soon-to-be-created force. Sub-Inspector Fox, who by this time had married Eliza-Anne Jane, the daughter of Capt William John Ottley, and had one child, applied for and obtained this position on 6 January 1857. He was recommended for the post by Sir D McGregor, Inspector General, Irish Constabulary, Dublin, and resigned from his force in February that year *on being appointed to the English Police*. Towards the end of his service in the Irish police, he was, on occasions, in charge of 130 men which helped convince the Magistrates and Committee that he would be capable of controlling an establishment of around 150 officers. Certain members of the Committee had wanted to appoint a military officer to the position, but the majority were of the opinion that if this were to be done, the new police may not be run on civilian lines and certainly would not have the backing of the public



The County had taken over the recently built lock-up at Belper for its headquarters. Willoughby took up residence with his family at Field House. Whilst the lock-up still stands on Matlock Road, Field House, which was located on Bridge Street at its junction with Field Lane, was demolished in the 1950s

Field House, pictured just prior to demolition, believed to be the Chief Constable's first residence in Derbyshire. Photo courtesy of the Belper Historical Society

With his past experience in police duties, Chief Constable Fox helped organize the fledgling Derbyshire Constabulary and one of his first duties was to tour Derbyshire towns with a surgeon recruiting staff. Much to the annoyance of the newly formed Inspectorate of Constabulary, it was perhaps with his influence that the County police officers initially wore rifle-green coloured uniforms, as the Irish Constabulary had used this colour since it was re-organized in 1836. On occasions, the very early Derbyshire Police officers were termed *Our Rural Roberts, the Gentlemen in Rifle-green*

One of the first police officers to be appointed to the Constabulary on the recommendation of the Chief Constable was 21-year-old Constable 68 Barry Fox. Willoughby perhaps wished to help improve his brother's career and living conditions by taking him from Ireland with this appointment. He was promoted to Superintendent in October 1857 but resigned in August 1859 to go into business. A large number of other officers were recruited by Willoughby from the Irish Constabulary, usually being quickly promoted to the higher ranks. There were instances when his father also recommended new applicants

The *New Police Force* was not universally welcomed by the tax-paying public of Derbyshire, as they had to finance a service that was initially overstretched, with officers concentrating on main towns rather than the whole county. Police Divisions didn't exist until a couple of years after the force was established. The poor pay, 17 shillings per week for a 2nd class constable, and severe conditions imposed on officers meant that those recruited were not of the highest calibre and at least 50 of the 156 officers initially recruited in 1857 had resigned within a year. Drunkenness, or at least officers liking to indulge a little too much, was also to plague the force to a large extent until the early 1900s

Whilst Mr Fox had to deal with crime and disorder, he became a victim himself in 1868. He had dismissed a Sergeant James Connor from the force the previous year for disobedience of orders and this 42-year-old man and his family had subsequently fallen on very hard times. With 8 years' service in the Irish Constabulary, James had been one of the first constables to transfer to Derbyshire with Mr Fox. He blamed the Chief Constable for his current predicament and as Mr Fox walked home along Station Street, Derby, one rainy evening in March, Connor approached and fired a gun at point blank range at him. The spray of shot from the pistol wounded the Chief very slightly in his hand and leg. Connor was subsequently arrested and charged with the attempted murder of Mr Fox. The case was heard at the Summer Assizes later that year with the jury finding him guilty of the lesser crime of grievous bodily harm. It was said that if he had intended to kill the Chief Constable, the offender would not have fired so low. Connor was given 10 years' imprisonment

After 28 years as a police officer, Willoughby G Fox ended his career when he was forced to resign from the force on 5 April 1873. A couple of years earlier, rumours had circulated that the Chief Constable had been borrowing money from not only his Superintendents but also alehouse keepers within the area to pay off gambling debts. At least one of his cheques had not been honoured. A very vocal Magistrate, Mr Bateman, took up this matter with the Police Committee, when it was further established that Mr Fox had sold certain articles of police property, namely disinfectants and piping, without authority

It was confirmed that whilst on a visit to the police district in Bakewell, he had put pressure on Superintendent Williams to lend him 20/- . Ignoring his protests that, as he had just buried his wife, he had no money either, the officer had to borrow the money from a retailer. It was ascertained that, like a number of Mr Fox's debts, the money was never repaid

A subsequent enquiry showed that Mr Fox had brought his office into disrepute, although quite surprisingly, it was decided that, as he had resigned his position, he should not be prosecuted

During his Chief Constablenesship, the population of the county had come to accept the new force which had grown from 156 to over 200 officers and for the vast majority of time he had carried out a remarkable job. This had been commented on by the Police Committee upon his resignation

Willoughby died at Fulham in 1885



Mike Baker is a retired Derbyshire officer, now a civilian employee, with a particular interest in that county's forces

The late Terrence (Wayne) Johnson was also a retired Derbyshire officer and civilian. He had organized a new Police Museum at Derby Old Gaol

Inspector John Soutar Suttie, Arbroath Burgh Police: died on duty 8 March 1914

by Patrick W Anderson

Recently I purchased a publication called *Scottish Police Roll of Honour*, edited by David Acheson but published by the Police Roll of Honour Trust. I found that in the Tayside Police pages, there was an entry:

Inspector John Soutar Suttie, Arbroath Burgh Police - Died 8 March 1914, aged 48

The entry recorded: *Whilst visiting two of his constables he collapsed and died in front of them.* I decided to make further researches on this Police topic and visited the Arbroath library where I was able to find the newspaper report on this sudden death of a serving Officer of the Arbroath Burgh Police

Back in early 1914, there were a number of Police Forces within the County of Forfarshire as it was then called (renamed Angus in 1928): they were Arbroath Burgh Police, Brechin City Police, Dundee City Police, Forfar Burgh Police and Montrose Burgh Police. Kirriemuir Burgh Police and Broughty Ferry Burgh Police had ceased by 1914. The Arbroath Burgh Police had its Headquarters and Police Office in Market Place in Arbroath. The town of Arbroath was covered by the Burgh Police within the Burgh boundary and the County Police covering the landward area. The population of the town in 1911 was just 20,647. The Burgh Police ranks were Constable, Sergeant, Inspector and Chief Constable with one of the Inspectors being the Chief Constable's Deputy. The Burgh Police did not have ranks like Lieutenant such as the City Police of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen had at this time. That Lieutenant rank was replaced in the 1940s by the rank of Chief Inspector. During the years that Inspector Suttie served with the Burgh Police Force, the Chief Constable was Duncan McNeill. He had been its Chief Constable from 1884 and the *Arbroath herald* of 6 December 1913 reported that Mr Duncan McNeill had tendered his resignation as Chief Constable. The report said that he had succeeded John Mime 30 years before

At 9pm on Saturday 7 March 1914, Inspector Suttie commenced his duty of the night shift section of the Burgh Police. Although he had not been feeling well lately, he went on duty anyway. From 9pm until 3am on Sunday 8 March, he attended to his duties within the