

# 50th Anniversary of Devon & Cornwall Constabulary

## 'Honouring Our Heritage, Inspiring Our Future'

By MARK ROTHWELL and SAMANTHA HILL

**This year saw the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Devon & Cornwall Constabulary. On 1st June 1967, the Cornwall Constabulary, Devon & Exeter Police and Plymouth City Police amalgamated into one force by order of then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins.**

Although it largely went by without a hitch, it was a union that not everybody wanted.

The Cornwall Constabulary, which had existed since 1856, was a perfectly happy force that proudly policed its unique county for more than a century. Likewise Plymouth, an even older force evolved from a watch and ward system, was two years into a three-year reform plan when the force, led by Ronald Gregory of later Yorkshire Ripper investigation fame, was abolished.

Fierce battles raged during the first meeting of the new joint police authority, with the organisation of the top corridor and the siting of the force headquarters high on the agenda.

In the end, Devon won the day and Lt. Col. R.B. Greenwood, the chief constable of Devon & Exeter, was appointed leader of the amalgamated force with the chief constables of

Cornwall and Plymouth relegated to ACC and DCC respectively. Former Plymouth City officers, unwilling to accept the inevitable, refused to work beyond the city boundary for a short time, while those with strong allegiance to the Cornwall Constabulary continued to wear their Cornish uniform accoutrements for many years after amalgamation.



Over time, the scepticism and parochial-thinking eroded, largely thanks to the charismatic John Alderson, chief constable from 1973 to 1982, who gave the force much to focus on by championing community policing in earnest and oversaw his force's abolition of the women's department, bringing women constables on par with their

male colleagues in 1976. A talented academic, he also made great strides in improving the public image of the force in light of national changes to the criminal justice system.

In the present, the growing pains of amalgamation are long forgotten. Indeed, many young in service don't realise the counties were divided as they were, and the fiftieth anniversary was an opportunity to change that misconception.

On 1st June 2017, the force initiated various projects to celebrate the occasion, planned in the six months to June by the '50th Anniversary Working Group' consisting of officers and staff from all disciplines across the peninsula.

### Historic Patrols

Inspired by the war centenary patrols, the South West Police Heritage Trust (founded in 2015 to manage the force's heritage collection) provided 1960s uniforms for a series of historic patrols in the region's three cities – Exeter, Plymouth and Truro. Despite the scorching June sunshine, Chief Constable Shaun Sawyer and Deputy Chief Constable Paul Netherton took to the streets in full Sixties' kit, including capes,



*DCC Paul Netherton  
at Exeter's Cathedral Green*



*Class of '66: (Left to right) Brian Tapley, Jim Shand and Reg Davison*

whistles and wooden truncheons.

### 50 Years, 50 Voices

It was opportune that 1st June 1967 remained in the living memory of many, making a project to encourage officers and staff from pre and post-amalgamation to submit their written reflections wholly justified. Chief Inspector Jo Arundale and civilians Reg Davison and Mark Rothwell spent five months collating stories, anecdotes and photographs into a short written account titled *50 Years, 50 Voices*. Making the best use of technology, an opportunity to interview serving officers on film saw the creation of four video shorts; Steve Toms, the detective constable who helped the FBI crack the large-scale smuggling of Egyptian antiquities into Devon in the 1990s, was interviewed on film and also discussed his relentless pursuit of a Spanish gang caught smuggling millions of pounds worth of cannabis into North Devon by trawler. Harry Tangye, Devon & Cornwall's best-known serving AFO and Traffic Officer, also told his story, describing how he first applied to join the force at the age of ten by writing to the local inspector! Finally, seizing on

the opportunity to interview the force's up-and-comings, six trainee constables were plucked from their lunch breaks at headquarters and asked about their aspirations, providing a tender and forward-thinking look at the police constables of the future.

### Chief Constable's Luncheon

A luncheon of old and new, past and present. Chief Constable Shaun Sawyer welcomed attendees and marked the beginning of the 50th Anniversary celebrations by inviting officers and staff to a luncheon at Devon and Cornwall Police HQ. The event marked the first time that three of the Force's longest members of staff were in the same place. Brian Tapley, Jim Shand and Reg Davison all joined in pre-amalgamation in 1966, and between them had racked up over 153 years of police service. Previous Chief Constable Sir John Evans was in attendance, as were the Cornwall High Sheriff Sarah Coryton and the Devon High Sheriff Helen Lindsay-Fynn.

### Class of '66

It was remarkable to learn in the

planning phase that three members of the force would also be celebrating their fiftieth year of service. Reg Davison, who joined the Cornwall Constabulary as a cadet in 1966, completed thirty years' service as a constable before starting work as a civilian in the force's misconduct investigation department. Brian Tapley and Jim Shand, both former Devon & Exeter Police, also celebrated their half-centuries, with Brian now working in Witness Care and Jim a Resource Deployment Officer at Force Headquarters. With none of the three showing signs of retiring any time soon, there certainly could be some length of service records broken over the next few years.

### The Tardis on Tour

Although not strictly a relic of the past fifty years, Devon & Cornwall Police's very own collapsible 'TARDIS' police box went on tour around the counties. Built several years ago by the Friends of the Devon & Cornwall Constabulary Heritage Resource, the iconic blue behemoth drew attention wherever it went and 'selfies' were the order of the day.



Call Handlers Chloe Savin and Mark Rothwell with the 'TARDIS'

### Devon and Cornwall High Teas

Celebratory High Teas were arranged throughout the region and were attended by the Force's LPA Commanders, cadets, street pastors, and officers and staff, both past and present.

The Plymouth High Tea was attended by Plymouth's recently-appointed Chief Superintendent Dave Thorne and Plymouth's former Chief Superintendent, now Assistant Chief Constable, Andy Boulting. Both dressed in historic uniform during the afternoon tea to mark the anniversary. The event was held at the Plymouth Lord Mayor's residence at Eliot Terrace.

Exeter High Tea was held at the Guildhall in Exeter and was attended by Chief Superintendent Jim Colwell, Superintendent Sam De Reya, Superintendent Toby Davies and Inspector Jane Alford-Mole, with a guest appearance from former Chief Constable, Sir John Evans.

South Devon High Tea took place in Torquay and was attended by South Devon Superintendent Jacqui Hawley, Devon Commander Chief Superintendent Jim Colwell, South Devon Critical Incident Manager Inspector Si Jenkinson, and Police

Chaplain Mr Slade. The Police Drones Unit made a special appearance and treated attendees to a drone launch. Crowds watched as the drone took to the skies, showing off its operational capability and highlighting how the Force and its technologies have evolved over the past 50 years.

### Badges, Epaulettes and Lanyards

Officers and staff were offered the opportunity to purchase special fiftieth anniversary epaulettes and lanyards to wear for the remainder of 2017. The black sliders were embroidered with gold thread and displayed the officer or staff member's collar number with the words 'Devon & Cornwall Police 50 Years.' All proceeds of the sales went to charity. In addition, 6,500 enamel pin badges were produced and gifted to every officer, staff member and cadet.

### Oral History Project

A liaison between Plymouth University's Professor Kim Stevenson, also a PHS member, and historian Mark Rothwell saw the interviewing of twenty-five retired police officers from the past fifty years. Students from the School of Law, Criminology & Government toured the counties for eight months taking oral histories which were generously transcribed by Devon & Cornwall Police at the project's conclusion.

The variety of views, particularly of amalgamation, was remarkable. It was always assumed that it was a 'takeover' by Devon, and sentiments were predictably negative among many of the Cornish and Plymothians we interviewed. It was interesting to hear from some of the latter that amalgamation was a blessing for constables desperately seeking their inspector's pips; the sudden expansion of the suitability pool meant it was much easier to obtain promotion.

### Time Capsule

On Friday 30 June 2017, Devon and Cornwall Police marked an end to their 50-year anniversary celebrations by burying a time capsule which will remain underground for 50 years. The ceremony took place around the flagpole at Police Headquarters at Middlemoor in Exeter, and contained materials ranging from a police choir record to that week's regional newspapers, all representing a snapshot of life to be unearthed in 2067.

In a speech, Chief Constable Shaun Sawyer said:

*We don't reside in history, we refer to it. You make history every day in what you do. I thank you all for coming from the bottom of my heart. If you look at any opinion poll, Devon and Cornwall Police stand out as number one as respected by the public, and that is hard earned. Hard earned by the previous generation and by this generation. In 50 years' time who knows where the Force will be, but if its values are still about fairness, respect, pride, courage and compassion then we won't go too far wrong because that is what our Force is about today.*

The Chief Constable, along with the Police and Crime Commissioner Alison Hernandez, laid the first piece of turf over the capsule before its burial, which was witnessed by officers and staff both past and present. Granite was then moved from a previous spot on HQ to the burial site and three heathers were planted, all representing Devon and Cornwall Police with a nod to Dorset Police and acknowledgment of the Alliance.

This was then topped with a plaque which read 'Honouring our heritage, inspiring our future.' The capsule was packed with police memorabilia, symbolising the transition from old to new and included, among other things, Annual Reports from 1967-2017, an Exeter Police & Community



Chief Constable Shaun Sawyer and PCC Alison Hernandez burying the time capsule.

Choir recording, old photos from the past fifty years, a police mobile data device, an old police radio, letters from police cadets, *Policing the West Country* book written by police staff Mark Rothwell, a police chaplain epaulette and Bible, various items from the force support groups, video and audio recordings, posters, leaflets and ephemera from the past half-century.



**MARK ROTHWELL** is a police historian and author with an interest in policing in the counties of Devon and Cornwall. He has worked for Devon & Cornwall Constabulary as a control room operator since 2009. He is currently working on his second book *Invicta: A Biography of R.C.M. Jenkins*, who was the chief constable of Penzance from 1937 to 1941.

**SAMANTHA HILL** is a Press Officer for Devon and Cornwall Police based in Police Headquarters.

## Station at Blandford Forum?

LEN WOODLEY

Whilst on holiday at Bournemouth recently I strayed to Blandford Forum.

As I wandered around the town I noticed a building with a notice describing the place as the original police station. Also inscribed, which you can possibly just make out, is an imprint announcing 'Borough Police'.

Naturally I took a photograph or two.

According to Martin Stallion and David Wall, Blandford had its own police 'force' from 1835 until 1889.



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# Doncaster Borough Police and the Suffragettes

By JOHN BROWN

**Following his appointment as the Chief Constable of Doncaster Borough Police, Mr William Adams did not have to wait long before his force made the national press as a result of militant suffragette activity.**

The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) had been founded in Manchester in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst, and had become one of the more militant groups of the women's suffrage movement. In 1912 the group had stepped up their campaign with a series of arson attacks aimed at forcing the government to accede to their demands for suffrage.

A small group of suffragettes had gathered around Miss Violet Key Jones, who maintained a house on Osborne Road in Doncaster. Miss Jones had been a prominent organizer for the WSPU in York, and in May of 1913 she took part in an open air meeting of suffragettes in Waterdale, Doncaster. Unfortunately for the suffragettes, a hostile crowd had gathered and, not content with heckling main speaker Barbara Wylie, the crowd started to throw orange peel and other objects, causing the meeting to break up. The suffragettes and their supporters had to be rescued from the crowd by borough police officers.

In the weeks after the break-up of this meeting, and possibly

motivated by revenge, a corrosive substance was poured onto the greens at the Doncaster golf club in Rossington, and an incendiary device was discovered under the stairway in Wheatley Hall, but fortunately the device failed to ignite. Due to the campaign for suffrage being conducted at that time, the WSPU were suspected of both incidents. Wheatley Hall was vacant at the time and in the process of being sold, so it was quite easy for the culprits to break a window and enter in order to leave their device. The fact that the device was badly assembled and wrapped in WSPU literature undoubtedly helped confirm police suspicion against the WSPU.

However, the suffragettes had not finished, and between 1.00 and 2.00am on the morning of the 3rd June two persons, a male and a female, broke a window and entered

Westfield House in Balby. The house was also known locally as "Fisher Park" after the owner, Mrs Alice Fisher. At that time Mrs Fisher was away from the premises and it is believed that the two persons who entered thought that the house was unoccupied. It must have come as a complete surprise therefore when the housekeeper, 72-year-old Miss Mary Temple Beecroft, appeared at the top of the staircase holding a candle. Miss Beecroft had heard the sound of breaking glass and with considerable bravery on her part had decided to confront the "burglars".

It was the normal practice of the suffragettes not to attack properties which may have endangered the life of occupants, and as a result they targeted empty premises during their campaign of arson. The two "burglars" apologised to Miss Beecroft and promptly left the premises.



*Westfield House, Balby, target of the suffragettes*



*Lillian Lenton in the prison exercise yard at Armley gaol in 1913*

The housekeeper noticed that the intruders appeared to be carrying a bundle when they left the house.

The police were sent for, and Sergeant Needham arrived by tram at about 6.30am. The officer searched the house and grounds, and found a cardboard box containing paraffin, cotton wool and firelighters. He also found some newspapers and a label containing the name Violet Key Jones, the suffragette who maintained a house on Osborne Road in Doncaster.

As a result of discovering this evidence, the police arrested two suspects Harry Johnson and Augusta Winship, from amongst the small group of suffragettes at Osborne Road. Both suspects were then identified by Miss Beecroft. Harry Johnson was a junior reporter on a local newspaper who supported the suffragette movement. He was often to be found in the company of the Doncaster suffragettes.

When the two suspects appeared at Doncaster Borough Police Court, because of the considerable local interest the court was packed with residents. Also in attendance were a number of suffragettes and their supporters, and there was a minor sensation after proceedings had

commenced when one of these suffragettes stood up in the public gallery to claim that the police had arrested the wrong person. This particular lady, who gave the name May Denis, stated that it was she, and not Augusta Winship, who had been the companion of Harry Johnson at Westfield House at the time of the incident in question.

Eventually Johnson and Denis were charged with being found on enclosed premises with intent to commit arson and both were committed for trial at Leeds Assizes.

Unfortunately for the Doncaster force, the young woman who gave her name as May Denis was in fact a well-known suffragette called Lillian Lenton, a prominent activist in the WSPU. Together with another suffragette, she had set fire to the tea house in London's Kew Gardens in February 1913 and had been sentenced to 18 months in prison, where she went on hunger strike and became seriously ill with pleurisy before being released quietly and without publicity by the authorities.

The government, concerned that these activities of the suffragettes would probably end in a death - and martyrdom - before too much longer, rushed through a piece of legislation called the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act 1913, which became known as the "Cat and Mouse Act". The legislation provided for the release of any prisoner who became ill in prison as a result of a hunger strike. The intention was to return them to prison as soon as they were well enough to resume their sentence. This legislation was primarily aimed at the suffragette movement,

Lillian Lenton was therefore the woman at Doncaster Police Court who admitted forcing entry at Westfield House. It was common practice for the suffragettes to give false names

when arrested in an effort to obstruct police enquiries.

Attempts were also made to obstruct the court process and constantly deny the authority of a male-dominated justice system.

In addition, once sent to prison on remand or on sentence their strategy was to take advantage of the "Cat and Mouse Act" and either threaten or begin a hunger strike which then usually forced the authorities to free them from prison.

Lillian Lenton duly went on hunger strike at Armley gaol in Leeds, until she was released to a safe house pending her trial. Doncaster detectives were positioned at the house to ensure that she did not escape, but Lenton was experienced at foiling the police and, dressing up as a man, she left the house and escaped, much to the embarrassment of the Doncaster force.

Lenton committed further offences before being arrested in Liverpool in 1914 and was then returned for trial at Leeds Assizes for the Doncaster offence. She was found guilty and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment, but again went on hunger strike and was released after a short time in prison.

The unfortunate Harry Johnson was sentenced to 12 months hard labour in Wakefield prison.

In her later life Lenton was to become the financial secretary of the National Union of Women Teachers and died in 1972. She never married.



**Originating from Doncaster, JOHN BROWN is a retired Police Inspector, having worked for 33 years in the Lincolnshire and the West Midlands forces. On retirement from the police service he worked as a law instructor in Police recruit training at the regional police training centre, Ryton-on-Dunsmore, and also trained Immigration and Customs officers. John then became a Senior lecturer in Policing at the University of Northampton.**