

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.

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Acknowledgements :

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