

WHERE DID THE RANKS COME FROM

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The trouble with being interested in Police History is that a glimmering of interest is mistaken by one's colleagues for an indicator of encyclopedic knowledge. Those who show such interest find their desks cluttered with demanding letters from family historians requiring intimate and comprehensive details of the careers of their illustrious ancestors believed to have been in the Police Service in the 1850's. Other such unsolicited mail includes requests from local Clubs and Societies looking to add one's name to their list of free speakers and letters from Bob Bartlett alternatively begging and demanding copy for his journal. All these are as nothing compared to the avalanche of semi-literate letters from bona fide collectors of items of police uniform from around the globe.

The latest in a string of little ancillary tasks connected with Police History which landed on my lap was a seemingly innocent request from a County Council employee for the date of the introduction of Chief Superintendent and Chief Inspector ranks in the Police Service. After reaching for my 'Critchley' I appreciated that this simple enquiry could not be simply answered. A few days later I attended a Carousel Course at the Police Staff College and was prepared to devote an hour to solving this little conundrum. After spending considerably more time than I had anticipated I reached two conclusions. The first was that the Police Staff College Library was the loneliest place in Hampshire each evening. The second was that I was not going to find the answer to the question.

Neither rank seems to have had a place in Rowan and Mayne's Organisation in 1829 nor do they appear to have originated from the structures set up under the Municipal Corporations Act.

By 1859 the Police and Constabulary Almanac was showing a Chief Superintendent in some Forces such as Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Dorsetshire Huntingdonshire, Somersetshire, Staffordshire and East Suffolk. It appears that there was literally one Chief Superintendent, or Chief of the Superintendents in each of these Forces and in some locations such as

Cornwall, the Chief Superintendent was also the Deputy Chief Constable. In fact the 1839 County Police Act required a Chief Constable to appoint one of his Superintendents to act as his Deputy in his absence.

While the rank of Chief Superintendent appears to have originated during the 1850's there appears to be no comparable early development of Chief Inspector rank. A study of Police and Constabulary almanacs for the 1850's and 1860's reveals no officer designated as Chief Inspectors.

That Chief Inspector rank was slower to develop is also apparent from the report of the Committee on the Police Service of England and Wales and Scotland, the Desborough Committee, which reported in 1919. Appendix I of the report samples 12 County Forces and 8 Borough Forces. Of those sampled only one County, Lancashire, and 2 boroughs, Birmingham and Worcester had officers of the rank of Chief Inspector on a higher scale of pay than Inspectors. The Committee also noted that in Glasgow there was a rank of 'Lieutenant' corresponding to that of Chief Inspector, The same report also revealed that 4 of the 12 counties sampled had Chief Superintendents as did 3 of the 8 boroughs. It would appear that the Desborough Committee set the scene for the more universal introduction of both Chief Inspector and Chief Superintendent rank which were included in the recommendations of the report as part of a proper national rank structure.

I still remain uncertain of the precise origins of both of these ranks and look forward to the next issue of this journal where I am sure at least a dozen fellow members will have a proper answer to this seemingly innocuous question.