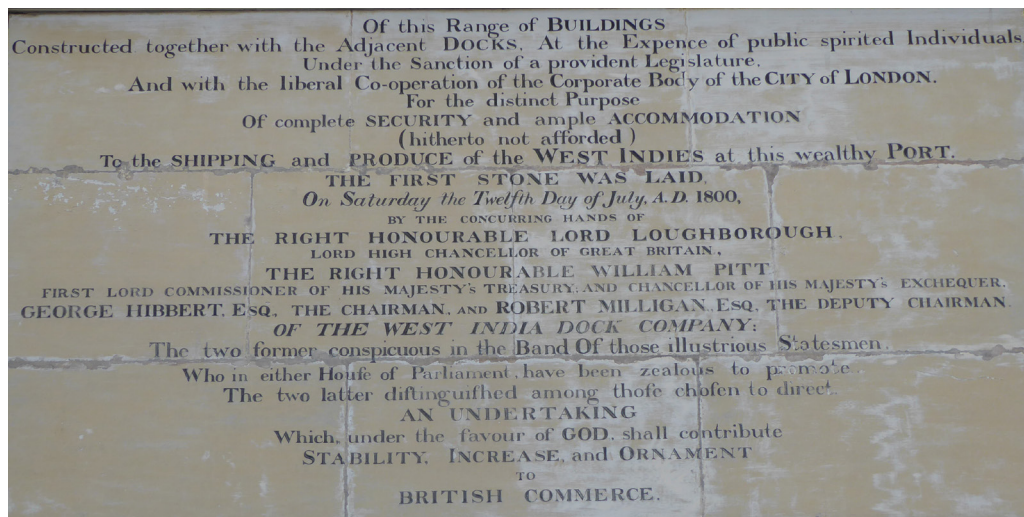


Adoption by Government

The cost of running and maintaining the Marine Police was a heavy one for the West India Committee to bear, despite the contributions from the government. Although focusing on West India Trade, the Marine Police were patrolling an area of the river used by other traders, who all benefited significantly from their work. The cost of running the Marine Police for the first 12 months was £4,295, 9 shillings and 5 pence (£506,468 today), of which £1,946, 9 shillings and 5 pence was paid by the West India Committee. Early in January 1799, the Committee sent a letter to the Duke of Portland, which included a request that he talk to the Treasury about further funding, to which the Duke agreed. In order to accommodate this level of spending, the Committee had to raise the fee on trade for several goods in May 1799. The issue of funding was so severe at times during the first two years of the force that Colquhoun and Harriott had to pay the men's wages out of their own pocket, a reflection of the dedication that both men had towards the institution.

It is clear, however, that Colquhoun had never intended for the Marine Police Institution to be forever run and paid for by the West India Committee but had instead hoped that it would be adopted by the government. As early as 1798, he had asked his friend, Jeremy Bentham, the great philosopher and social thinker, to draft a Bill for Parliament for the proper establishment of the police force. The Marine Police had existed with government support and sanction utilising provisions in the old Bumboat Act, not on the authority of a specific Act of Parliament. Eventually the bill, known as *An Act for the more effectual Prevention of Depredations on the River Thames, and in its vicinity*, was laid before Parliament and was passed in 1800. When the Act was implemented, the Marine Police passed from private to public hands and was renamed the 'Thames River Police', the name by which they are generally known even today, despite later changes. The Bill brought new responsibilities and powers, as well as changes in the law and the punishments for crimes. The size of the institution was increased, with the magistrates being tasked with employing a sufficient number of constables but no more than thirty Surveyors. As time went on, it was discovered that only around twenty Surveyors were needed, that being the number in 1814, with just over forty watermen/constables being normally employed. The cost was established as being no more than £ 8,000 a year, with an aim eventually to reduce that figure. Initially this bill, and thus the institution, was only to exist for a period of seven years. The magistrates now had the power to deal with matters on the entire river as well as in the counties of Middlesex, Surrey, Essex and Kent.

The West India Committee did not just rely upon the Thames River Police to manage crime on the river. Even before they instituted the Marine Police, the Committee had worked to establish a series of secure docks where goods could be unloaded and stored without threat of theft. Many years of work and lobbying led to the creation of the West India Dock Company, many members of which were also members of the West India Committee. In 1802 the Company opened the West India Docks. This fortress-like complex at the Isle of Dogs survives today both as a place name and also in the form of



a series of warehouses in which many businesses and restaurants are based, as well as the Museum of London Docklands. This building is but a remnant of the original warehouse that was at one time the largest brick-built building in the world, extending to over one mile in length.

The dedication stone for West India Docks



West India Docks

Police guards were employed at the West India Docks and whilst these officers were attached to the Thames River Police Office, they were paid for by the West India Dock Company. Many more secure docks were built over the course of the next few decades and the governing bodies of these requested, and were granted, the same arrangements for policing them.

With the passing of the 1800 Act, the Police became officially responsible for the protection of all trade on the river. The Discharging Department was, however, closed following adoption by the state. Patrick Colquhoun did not remain as Magistrate, returning instead to his former position at

Queen's Square, although he now became the Receiver for the Thames River Police Office, being responsible for taking all fees, penalties and forfeitures at the office and for paying salaries. John Harriott, however, continued serving the Thames River Police for the remainder of his working life. Other magistrates were also appointed to the Thames Magistrates Court but Harriott remained the driving force behind the institution.

The success of the Marine Police was built upon; most crimes that were dealt with by the Thames River Police and Magistrates Court were now petty larcenies and misdemeanours as opposed to the grand larcenies of old. However, the reduction in crime led to a decrease in seizures of goods, of which Thames River Policemen received a share by way of commission. In order to offset this loss of funds brought about by their own success, the officers received a pay rise. Crime on the river during the first decade of the nineteenth century was varied, with the Police not only preventing theft, but in one instance also intercepting a large shipment of counterfeit Prussian coins and even arresting a suspected French spy by the name of Giuseppe (or Joseph) Canolle, who was disguised as a sailor. In addition, there were issues with allegations of foreign sailors being illegally pressed into service on British vessels.

The great success that the River Police had achieved was reflected in the fact that pilfering goods had dropped dramatically. Now the Magistrates identified the theft of coals and timber as the most prevalent and difficult crimes to prevent on the river, whilst on land their most arduous task was to combat fighting and riots between foreign sailors, of which there were a large amount in Wapping at this point in history. This demonstrates that the Thames River Police were not just confined to operations on the river but were also required to maintain law and order on its banks. This reflected the need for an effective preventative police on land, a fact that would again become apparent in December 1811.



The Thames Police Office at Wapping