

Foundation

By early 1797 the West India Committee no longer wished to offer the huge rewards that they had previously. It was simply too expensive to do so, with the value of the stolen goods often being significantly less than the reward, particularly if rewards had to be paid to multiple parties. This was in addition to the legal expense that was incurred by prosecuting the thieves. Furthermore, these methods had not resulted in a demonstrable decrease in the crime rate. By February the Committee started to consider other possibilities to reduce thefts from West India Merchant Vessels.

They decided to approach Patrick Colquhoun, to help produce a plan to tackle theft on the river. Given his accomplishments, he was regarded as an authority on crime and policing and it was entirely natural that the West India Committee would approach him for help to develop a new strategy. He sent a letter outlining his ideas, which was duly discussed at a meeting of the West India Merchants Committee in January 1798. After considering his suggestions, they sent extracts of the letter to every Committee member so that they could make recommendations. Consequently, at the end of the month, they resolved that a Marine Police force, modelled on Colquhoun's plan, would be an excellent idea to check the "*enormous plunderage on board West India ships on the River*", and Colquhoun was invited to attend the next meeting to discuss his proposals.

Already, figures in Government were interested in the potential that this proposal might have; indeed the Duke of Portland, the Home Secretary of the time, wrote to Colquhoun to request that he might be informed of the outcome of the meeting. Planning continued over the next two months, with the Committee wishing to ensure that the costs of the new institution were kept as low as reasonably possible, to avoid a repetition of their previous situation. By the end of March, it was resolved that the Committee would establish a Marine Police force. Colquhoun was asked to draw up a concise plan from the ideas and discussions of the previous few months, so that the scheme might be shown to the Duke of Portland in the hope that he would approve it and thus the project might be instituted.

It was at this point that the other great figure of the early River Police appeared- John Harriott. As a merchant and in his role as a Justice of the Peace for Middlesex, Harriott also appreciated the problems on the Thames and he too had developed a plan for a River Police, which he had sent to the Duke of Portland in 1797, but it seems the Duke never read this. Harriott later attributed the proposed expense of £14,000 a year as the reason it was not adopted by the Duke. In April 1798, Colquhoun and Harriott met to discuss the latter's plan. Harriott's proposals made an impression on Colquhoun, who requested that he might be allowed to keep them so that he might show them to figures in government. As a result, the two men worked together over the next two years, with Harriott describing Colquhoun as the "*most indefatigable preserving man I ever knew*", crediting his efforts with the West India Committee and government, whilst Colquhoun praised Harriott's dedication, knowledge and intellect.



John Harriott

John Harriott was born in Great Stambridge, Essex 1745 and has been variously described as a merchant, adventurer, inventor and buccaneer. Apparently inspired by *Robinson Crusoe*, he joined the Royal Navy at a young age, travelling widely. After his service, he joined the East India Company's army in 1768. On service with them in India he was shot and wounded in the leg, which necessitated his retirement from the Company. The injury would stay with him for the rest of his life. He returned home to become a farmer and farmed in both England and America at various times over the next few years, but was not as successful as he wished in either country. Although he did purchase some slaves during his time in America, he became an abolitionist. He returned to England where he became a Justice of the Peace for Middlesex and opened various commercial ventures. Eventually, after helping found the Marine Police, he wrote an autobiography called *Struggles through Life*

In a meeting on 8th June, following letters of support from the Duke of Portland, the West India Committee resolved to put the plan into immediate effect. Harriott was recommended to the Duke of Portland as the Resident Magistrate, an appointment that was confirmed, whilst Colquhoun became the Superintending Magistrate. The search began for a potential police office, preferably to be located at Wapping New Stairs, as this was geographically the centre of the Pool of London and thus the logical place for a police institution to monitor the trade on the river. There were also various other requirements for the building; a suitable room for a Court was required in addition to apartments, offices, waiting rooms and a Lock-up House. An appropriate building was located at No. 259 Wapping New Stairs.

The Marine Police Office officially opened on 2nd July 1798 and it is impressive how quickly arrangements had progressed from the reception of Colquhoun's initial plan in January. The personnel of the new institution were composed of various ranks, all of whom were subordinate to the magistrates at Wapping. Foremost were the Surveyors, a rank equal to modern inspectors, who were led by the Chief Surveyor. There were also the Watermen, who were responsible for rowing the boats and assisting Surveyors in the execution of their duties. Ship Constables were employed to stand watch on those vessels that were being unloaded, including staying aboard during the night. Eight land constables were appointed for work on shore, although they could also be deployed as deputy river officers. The officers themselves were sailors who had either served in the navy or worked on the river, and thus were well aware of the issues on the Thames, as they were part of that community.

The institution went beyond employing officers and also employed a force of Lumpers, to unload vessels, under the control of Master Lumpers as foremen, the idea being that they would be less likely to steal the goods they were unloading after having been vetted. This was known as the Discharging Department. The number of Lumpers employed by the institution rose and fell as demand on the river required, but in the beginning it was intended that there would be thirty-five foremen and three-hundred and fifty Lumpers, divided into thirty-five gangs. The exact number of people employed is debateable, in part due to the changing numbers of Lumpers but also on the basis of different definitions of Police Officer, but there were approximately fifty officers employed initially. The goods were also protected on the lighters that carried them back to the quays; the lighters were loaded under the watchful eye of police officers, with the number of casks and packages being recorded on a printed *way bill*, which was carried by a police officer accompanying the lighter and delivered to the Police Quay guards. The accompanying officer would then take a receipt for these goods and return to the ship.

Marine Police Lumpers

Marine Police Lumpers were subject to a strict dress code, in order to prohibit them from wearing those clothes that had been used to conceal stolen goods. They were not allowed to go ashore during the day, instead eating and drinking aboard the ship on which they were working, which prevented them from taking stolen goods ashore. They were required to assemble each morning at a certain time and would then be taken to the ship where they would work. They were searched upon boarding the vessel, so as to prevent them bringing items that could be used to steal goods, and when they left, for stolen goods. They were read a notice each morning by the attending Police Officer, warning them against stealing goods. This notice was also attached to the main mast of the ship to remind them of this throughout the day.

Surveyors were to patrol the river day and night in shifts of six hours so that, as one boat arrived back at the Wapping Office, the other set out, meaning that there was a constant police presence of two boats on the river. They were to watch out for suspicious activity on the Thames and intercept anyone who appeared to be stealing from a vessel or carrying what appeared to be stolen goods. They were also required to visit ships being discharged by the institution's Lumpers once during the day and once again at night, monitoring them at all times, especially West India vessels. The force, like so many since, also acted on information received from the public to apprehend miscreants. A Quay Guard, composed of three surveyors and thirty sworn officers, was employed to protect the goods being landed on the quayside, as demand required, day and night in shifts of six hours. Surveyors patrolling on the river would also visit, to ensure everything was in order.

MARINE POLICE-OFFICE,

No. 259, WAPPING NEW-STAIRS,

Established by a General Meeting of West-India Planters and Merchants,

UNDER THE SANCTION OF GOVERNMENT.

Rules and Orders

To be observed by Constables and Lumpers while on Duty on-board of West-India Ships, discharging their Cargoes in the River Thames.

RESPECTING CONSTABLES OR WATCHMEN.

EACH Constable, while on-board, must be occasionally in the Hold as well as upon Deck; and, when Two Constables are on-board, One must be constantly in the Hold, and the other on Deck. They must be particularly careful, watchful, and active, in both Situations, that no Person steals Sugar, Coffee, Pimento, Ginger, Rum, Cotton, or any other Article; and, if an Attempt is made to pilfer even the smallest Quantity, the Offender (whoever he may be) to be instantly seized and confined, until he can be carried before the Magistrate in One of the Marine-Police Boats, together with the Article stolen. — It will also be the peculiar Duty of the Constables to see that the Calks and Packages are not wilfully broke or injured, or Sugar or any other Article scattered about, either in the Hold or upon Deck, and to point out the same when it occurs to the Captain, Mate, or Master of Lumpers, that it may be prevented and remedied. — One Constable must always attend each Lighter; and, in that Case, the remaining Constable or Watchman to do Duty on-board, both in the Hold and upon Deck; and each must watch all Night: — And, to prevent this last Duty from being too severe, Relief will be given by fresh Men.

It will likewise be the indispensable Duty of the Constables on-board, and also the Master of Lumpers, to see that no Person shall come on-board to work with a Frock, Trowsers, Jamies, Under-Waitcoats with Pouches, or with Bags or empty Stockings, or any Thing else by which any Article can be conveyed away in a clandestine Manner; and, where this happens, the Names of the Persons to be returned to the Marine Police-Office; and the Dresses, Bags, &c. to be produced in Evidence against them.

It will be required of each Constable that he shall keep a Check-Book of the Work done by the Lumpers, agreeably to a Form which will be delivered; in which shall be stated the Duty they themselves perform, the Time the Work commences and is left off, and every other Occurrence; which must be reported weekly to the Marine Police-Office.

All Persons must be searched carefully when going a-shore in the Evening by the Constables. This Regulation can only be injurious to Rogues, and none but Rogues can be offended at a Measure found to be so indispensably necessary; and every Person, on leaving the Ship, who shall be detected with any Article belonging to the Ship or Cargo in his Possession unlawfully obtained, to be apprehended, detained, and sent to the Marine Police-Office, to be dealt with as the Law directs.

Every Constable, who shall, contrary to his Oath of Office, be detected in receiving a Bribe, or in conniving at any corrupt or unlawful Practice, to be rendered infamous, deprived of his Situation, and prosecuted as an atrocious Offender.

It will be the particular Duty of the Constables to assist the Captain and Mate in whatever relates to the Provisions, furnished and cooked on-board; and to see that Nothing is wasted, taken away, or misapplied; and that no unnecessary Expence is incurred in victualling the Persons employed to discharge the Ship.

It will also be the Duty of the Constables to see that Two Lanterns are lighted soon after Sun-Set, and hung up in the Main Shrouds, at the

RESPECTING FOREMEN-LUMPERS.

I. Each Foreman to go on-board in the same Boat with his Gang, and to see that every Person, whether Holder or Decker, shall be dressed in a round Jacket, Breeches, and Stockings; and that none shall enter the Ship either with a Frock, Jamie, or Trowsers; nor carry on-board any Bags, Stockings, Pouches, or any Thing else, whereby Sugar or other Articles may be carried out of the Ship.

II. Immediately on going on-board, the Foreman, assisted by the Gang shall get up the Derrick, and make every necessary Preparation for the Discharge, in which he is to proceed without Delay, and to see that his Gang perform their Duty with Diligence and Dispatch; and that he himself shews them a good Example. — The Working-Hours to be from Six in the Morning to Six in the Evening, in Summer, and from Sun-Rise to Sun-Set, in the Winter Months; and neither the Foreman nor any of his Gang to be permitted, on any Account, to go a-shore until after the quit Work in the Evening.

III. On quitting the Ship in the Evening, it will be the Duty of the Foreman to assist the Constables in searching all Persons going a-shore, and he shall afterwards accompany his Men in the same Boat.

IV. If, for Want of Entries or other Circumstances, Employment ceases in any One Ship, the Foreman with his Gang shall proceed to the Marine Police-Office for Instructions, unless he receives previous Directions from the Superintendent of Lumpers to proceed on-board another Ship.

GENERAL RULES

Applicable both to Constables and Lumpers.

All Persons, whether Constables or Lumpers, employed by, or attached to, the Marine Police-Establishment, are to have their Breakfast and Dinner, free of Expence, on-board the Ship under Discharge. — To breakfast precisely at Eight o'Clock, and to dine at One: To be allowed Half an Hour to Breakfast, and One Hour to Dinner.

Every Person, attached to the Marine Police-Establishment, while on Duty, (whether Constables, Lumpers, or others,) are to shew the utmost Respect to the Captain and Officers; and to behave civilly and as becometh them to every other Person on-board the Ship in which they are stationed.

The Wages of all Persons employed by the Marine Police-Establishment, shall be paid punctually on Saturday Evening by the Cashier at the Office, No. 259, Wapping New-Stairs. If, however, any Person shall act contrary to the Rules now laid down, or shall quit the Gang before the Expiration of the Week, or if the Work is finished, or Permission is given, such Offender shall forfeit the Wages then due, or such lesser Sum as the Magistrate, or Superintendent of Lumpers, shall deem a proper Deduction, to deter such Persons from committing the like Offence. And all Persons who misbehave, get drunk, or are found incapable of performing their Work in a proper Manner, will be immediately discharged.

The original Rules and Orders for the Marine Police

Originally the jurisdiction of the Marine Police went no further upstream than London Bridge, but eventually expanded over time. Their efforts were, of course, primarily focused on the Pool of London. The aim of the institution was to embrace the objectives of detection, under the Police Department, and prevention, under the Discharging Department. It was estimated that the new institution would save £10,000 a year in sugar losses alone. It was planned to cost the same as had been previously paid for watchmen and Lumpers, with the hope that all the money saved through crime prevention would thus be profit. All West India Merchants and Ship Owners were invited to sign up to the new system.