This display is part of a year-long project by the West India Committee to uncover a shared history between the Caribbean and police services today - that of the creation of the Thames Police, a pioneer of preventative policing whose founding principles influenced the development of policing in London and around the world. The West India Committee is a charity that promotes the welfare of the people of the West Indies and the assistance to the poor in London.

In 1798 the West India Committee worked with Patrick Colquhoun to establish the Marine Police. This was the first police force established in the UK and London to combat the enormous number of river-based crime gangs who attacked boats and ships and robbed their crews. The Marine Police were established with the approval of Government and the Marine Police Act was passed by Parliament. The new police force was first called the Thames Police, and was based at Wapping.

Colquhoun identified the gangs with sensational names such as Night Plunderers, Light-Horsemen, Heavy-Horsemen, Scuffle-hunters, and River Pirates. Colquhoun estimated that a total of 75,000 crimes, with a value of £1.5 million, occurred every year on the Thames. He suggested the cost of the annual crop of theft from the West Indian trade was £230,000 or 5% of the total value of the trade.

The Marine Police were so successful in preventing theft and saving the ships' cargoes that within two years they were responsible for saving £80,000. They were also responsible for preventing 1800s-style battles like the Thames police that was fought in Wapping in 1811.

Although aid was given to the Thames Police, they were not the only river police force. In 1833-39 the Metropolitan Police Marine Policing Unit was established in Wapping. The Thames River Police assisted with the ongoing investigation and patrolled the streets of Wapping to prevent further killings. The murder enquiry was not the first of its sort, as only a few months later a man was found murdered on the Thames.

In December 1811 there was a series of grisly murders in East London, which took place at the same station, the former Royal Mail Coach Station, where the Thames Police and later the Metropolitan Police were based.

The Thames Police Officer & Superintendent 1838-66, Patrick Colquhoun II, outside Wapping station, 2017

Mr Branford was not an educated man, but what to my idea was of much greater importance, he possessed a thorough knowledge of judge matters in general. I should say he was about the only half-caste superintendent I ever had.

At about half after 6 o'clock yesterday evening, while the magistrates were in execution of their official duty, a most Forward and Outrageous riot assembled around the Marine Police office. After fighting immediately attacked the windows, broke the dinner utensils, threw in large stones, and did a great deal of damage.

The Thames Police Office & Superintendent, 1838-66

The Thames River Police today

The Metropolitan Police and Thames Division

The Thames Police on duty today

The West India Committee Library and collection is inscribed as a UNESCO Memory of the World.