

The Metropolitan Police and Amalgamation

Following the Ratcliffe Highway murders, the Thames River Police continued to develop. It became clear that, although the Thames River Police had been highly effective in suppressing crime in the area they patrolled, it still existed further down the river, with River Pirates still operating near Gravesend. Thames River Police Sailing Cutters, first introduced in 1804, helped to limit their activities, and also prevent theft from naval stores and smuggling. The Cutter was crewed by one Surveyor and several Constables for periods of 14 days at a stretch. The East India Dock Company and other ship owners applied to the Thames River Police for assistance further downstream, a greater distance than the police rowing galleys could go; this showed how effective the Thames River Police were perceived to be at this time, but also demonstrated their limitations.

In order to cope better with the larger jurisdiction that the Thames River Police now had, Harriott proposed a new plan to the Home Office, which was accepted. To this end, they leased two old Hulks from the Navy in 1817, ships that had been used as prisons. HMS *Port Mahon* was placed beside Somerset House upriver from Wapping, whilst HMS *Tower* was placed downriver at Blackwall Point. However, John Harriott would not see this plan come to fruition. He died in early January 1817, whilst Patrick Colquhoun

died in 1820.

Floating Police Stations

The *Tower* was retired as a floating police station in 1826 and *Port Mahon* in 1836. A replacement, HMS *Investigator*, was stationed off Norfolk Street. This was replaced by HMS *Royalist*, in 1856. Another vessel, the *Scorpion*, was also used between 1858 and 1874. The *Royalist* was stationed at East Greenwich after 1874,



The *Royalist*

the previous location being protected by the new floating Waterloo Pier Police Station. The *Royalist* was known as 'the Abode of Bliss', after Inspector 'Daddy' Bliss, who lived aboard the vessel. The *Royalist* was not retired until 1894, with the establishment of Blackwall Police Station.

Eventually, in 1829 the Metropolitan Police Act was passed and thus the London Metropolitan Police came into existence. Although the New Police, as they were known, were hailed at the time as being a new way of policing, i.e. preventative, community policing, they were in fact built on the proven work of the Thames River Police. Robert Peel's *Principles of Law Enforcement*, the

ethical framework for this new era of policing on land, reflected this. Issued to every new Metropolitan Police officer in 1829, the principles outlined a concept of community policing whereby, "*The police are the public and the public are the police*". This had been a philosophy crucial to the success of the Thames River Police, who drew their men from the river community, recruiting ex-navy men and those who already worked on the Thames. The premise was that officers would understand the complexities of the place in which they worked, and in many cases, have an existing relationship with the local community. Patrick Colquhoun's ideas are often cited as one of the main inspirations behind Robert Peel's New Police and, even today, the Metropolitan Police present themselves as being first and foremost a preventative police force.

The Police Offices created in 1792 were absorbed into the new force but the Thames River Police continued as an independent institution for another 10 years. The Metropolitan Police Act 1839 meant that they were finally integrated into the Metropolitan Police on 27th August of that year to become Thames Division, as the Met was granted jurisdiction over the river. Bow Street also continued as a separate force for those ten years and was amalgamated with the Metropolitan Police in the same year but, unlike the Thames River Police, they did not continue to exist as a separate entity. The structure of Thames Division was also changed with the Magistrates Court being separated from the Wapping Station and removed to Arbour Square in Stepney. The old courtroom at Wapping was

We have a unique insight into the River Police in the middle of the nineteenth century, from an article published in *Household Words* magazine in February 1853, written by the famous author, Charles Dickens. He tells us, at that point in time, Thames Division's jurisdiction extended from Battersea to Barking Creek and consisted of ninety-eight men with eight duty boats and two supervision boats.

Among other facts, he describes the state of crime on the river. Some of the problems were still the same, notably theft by Lumpers. The preferred clothing for this was now a loose canvas jacket with a broad hem at the bottom which, when turned inside out, could conceal packages. Like their predecessors over

fifty years earlier, these men also smuggled goods ashore on behalf of a ship's crew. They were able to dispose of their stolen goods via marine store dealers, demonstrating that the problem of Receivers endured. Copper nails and other items used in ship construction were still being stolen from the shipyards by Shipwrights and other workmen.

Robert Branford

One example of Peel's police reflecting the London community was Robert Branford. Born in Stoke in 1817, Branford was described in Chief Inspector Cavanagh's memoirs, as "*the only half-caste superintendent the service ever had.*" Bradford joined the Metropolitan Police as a Constable in 1838, was promoted to Sergeant in 1846, permanently promoted to Inspector in 1852 and to Superintendent in 1856, retiring 10 years later. Cavanagh suggests Branford was highly respected, "*not an educated man; but what to my idea was of much greater importance, he possessed a thorough knowledge of Police matters in general*". Upon his retirement a Southwark Court Magistrate commended Branford on his "*well-earned testimonial*" and "*valuable services*". Branford reflects a rising black population in early 19th century London and challenges existing views about attitudes to race at the time. As the first Metropolitan Police officer of identifiable black heritage, he pre-dates modern-day preconceptions of black people's employment in the police by over a century.

The first uniforms

Becoming part of the Metropolitan Police meant the Thames River Police were issued with uniforms for the first time. Previously the men had only been issued with greatcoats. The earliest Metropolitan Police uniforms were based on the fashions of the day, in order to reflect that the Police were part of the community. In the same manner, the earliest Thames Division uniforms were based on clothing normally worn by sailors to reflect their area of responsibility. They wore a straw hat, with a black canvas cover to protect it during the winter, as well as reefer jackets with waistcoats. Inspectors wore peaked caps with a plain black uniform, and a coat. The black colour of these uniforms led to Thames Policemen being nicknamed Black Beetles.



Other types of criminal had now appeared, such as the Truckers, more smugglers than thieves, who aimed to smuggle ashore larger parcels of illicit goods than the Lumpers could manage. They often sold groceries and the like to sailors in order to get aboard vessels without suspicion, making them somewhat reminiscent of those who sailed Bumboats on the river for the purpose of committing crimes. Dickens also described the Dredgermen, who under the pretence of dredging articles up from the bottom of the river, would lurk near barges and other low craft and, when the opportunity presented itself, threw whatever they could get their hands on into the river. They would then return at a later point to dredge up these goods from the riverbed. The more skilled of these were able to go dry dredging, where they would use their dredges to whip away anything that might be lying on the deck of a barge or low ship.

Lastly, there were the Tier-rangers, who would silently wait alongside the tiers of shipping in the Pool of London during the night until they could hear the Captain and the Mate snoring aboard ship. They then boarded the vessel, entered the Captain's cabin and made off with money, watches, items of clothing, boots and the like. Dickens also "*looked over the charge books, admirably kept, and found the prevention so good that there were not five hundred entries (including drunk and disorderly) in a whole year.*"