

The influence of the Thames River Police

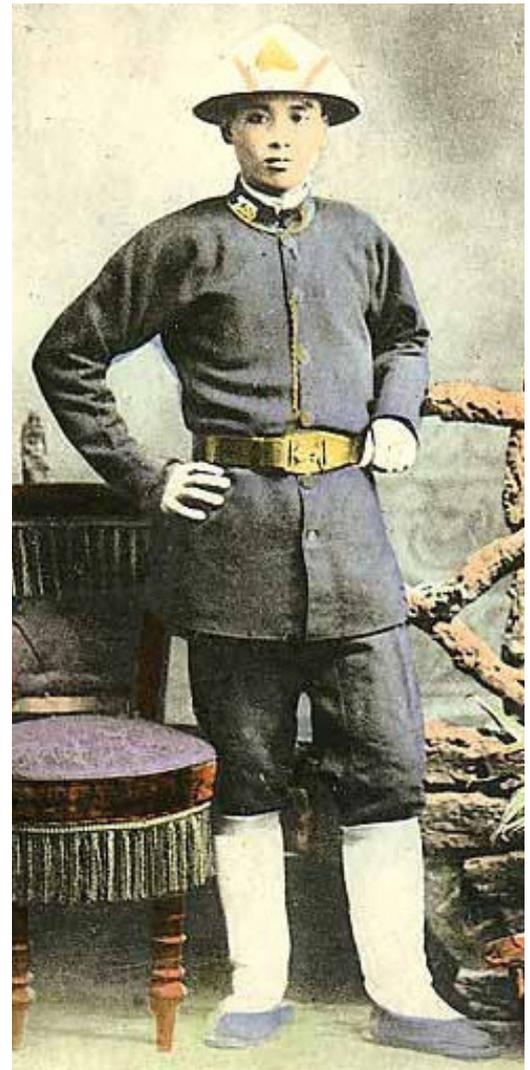
Although the Thames River Police do not enjoy universal renown, their influence has proved to be global. The necessity of policing the waters of major cities has become increasingly evident since the foundation of the Marine Police, and many other locales have created their own marine police force. The fact that they were visible and had full-time paid officers, who were familiar with the area they patrolled, set an important precedent. The principles upon which they were founded, namely that of preventative policing, heavily influenced the institution of the London Metropolitan Police, which has been both a model for other British police forces and indeed for forces around the world. Thus, these forces are also the inheritors of the legacy of the Marine Police. Even today the Metropolitan Police is still the best-known and most visible force in Britain and its methods and efficiency enjoy world-wide respect.

The Police System in many former British Colonies has been heavily based on the Metropolitan Police. In Hong Kong, following the formation of an initial police force by the military in the immediate aftermath of British acquisition of the Territory, the first Police Ordinance was passed and the police began to organise along British lines. To this end, three officers from the Metropolitan Police were sent to Hong Kong to lead the establishment of the new police force. This idea would be repeated in other places, with many Metropolitan Police officers being sent to serve and manage colonial police forces, taking the Metropolitan Police training manual with them. A number of police officers from the colonies were also sent to Britain to attend the Metropolitan Police training school.

Colonial police forces did not develop in the same fashion as the Metropolitan Police, with the semi-military model of the Royal Irish Constabulary being widely adopted as a more efficient means to maintain order. This is not to say that Metropolitan Police ideals were not implemented under British rule: they at least had some effect in Hong Kong, where their own Marine Police boasted the first integrated working force in the Hong Kong Police, with officers of British and Chinese origins living, working and socialising together.

Sydney, Australia established a force in 1833 modelled on the Metropolitan Police, albeit with additional duties. The urban Constabulary in Cape Town, South Africa was also very much based on the traditions of the Metropolitan Police. Canada, whose legal traditions grew out of a combination of French and English ideas, established the Toronto Police in 1835, again based on the Metropolitan model. This would be followed a few years later by the foundation of similar forces in Quebec City and Montreal. It is interesting to note however, that Canada's most famous police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, originally founded in 1873 as the North West Mounted Police, was based more on the models of France and Ireland, in that it was run on more militaristic lines than the Metropolitan force.

Law enforcement in the Caribbean had previously followed the traditional English system of policing based on parish constables and watchmen, albeit supported by military forces and local militia in fear of a slave rebellion. There were constables in Bermuda going as far back as 1620. The Caribbean's long history of policing led to it being a testing ground for reform to a Metropolitan model. Following the abolition of slavery, the Colonial Office attempted to establish a civil police force



A Hong Kong Police Officer in the early 20th Century



A Mounted Police Officer in Barbados

modelled on the Metropolitan Police, and worked with the Metropolitan Police to produce a system that was designed to be 'wholly free from local influence or any class of person', so that the new police force would not be under the control of the local planters who would use it to impose slavery by another name.

These reforms were carried out far in advance of similar reforms elsewhere in the empire and did result in reorganisation and modernisation on many islands. However, after 1838, the local context, rather than the original model, determined the nature of Caribbean Police forces. Many ideas were also retained from the more militaristic Royal Irish Constabulary, resulting in a blend of the two models.

Ultimately real reform failed; the resulting colonial Caribbean police forces were quite different from the Metropolitan model, with officers often being drawn from other islands and thus not being part of the community. Many officers were also old soldiers from the West India Regiment, who saw little difference between soldiering and policing. Many of the old colonial Caribbean forces are now famed for their brutality.

Whilst the Metropolitan model was frequently altered by local context, and contended with the harsher, militaristic aspects of the Royal Irish Constabulary model, the most important principle taken from the Thames River Police was universally applied throughout the British Empire, that of preventative policing. The Metropolitan Police today continues to have an effect on policing in the Caribbean and across the rest of the world by cooperating on various issues. In recent years, Metropolitan Police officers have either been seconded to or employed by police forces in the Caribbean region to assist with operational policing, training, tackling corruption, improving relations with the local community and reform.

Colquhoun's ideas and the Metropolitan Police model did not just spread throughout the British Empire. In fact, Colquhoun's *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* was very well received in the U.S.A., which had long since declared independence from Britain, and which utilised some of its ideas in the creation of its own police forces. However, it was not until the 1830s that the British model of policing was adopted in the USA. The New York Police was founded in the mid 1840s, not on a totally identical system to the Metropolitan Police, but instead adapting the model to incorporate American values and concerns. Nevertheless, it did still utilise some of the British force's most important aspects as it was based on the prevention of crime and disorder and visible patrolling of fixed beats, whilst also utilising rules based on those of the Metropolitan Police. Other major American cities would follow suit over the next decade and also establish police departments whose main focus was the prevention of crime and disorder.