

### **A History of the Somersetshire Constabulary - Part One**

*On loan from Bert Loxley's collection was a copy of the book created for the Centenary of the Somerset Force in 1956. I suspect that some of you are in possession of copies but many will not know of much of its content. Marian Davies wanted her father's returned to her but I took the opportunity of it being in my possession to extract some of its information. I intend to present some of the information, in instalments, in the next few editions of the Newsletter. With further thanks to Marian, herewith part one:*

Records of the Somerset Quarter Sessions survive back as far as 1607 and some Parish Accounts & Rolls of Quarter Sessions exist from 1588. From these and records held elsewhere in the country we know that Parish Constables existed for many years before the establishment of the police forces as we know them. But the parochial system was generally not too efficient and many Parish Officers paid others to deputise for their duties.

### **A History of the Somersetshire Constabulary - Part One (Continued)**

Many of those paid as deputies for the Parochial Officers left much to be desired in executing their responsibilities and the Parish Constable system was in particular disarray in London and larger urban areas. For this reason it was the metropolis and some large cities that were the main concern in the 18th Century. A Somerset man, Henry Fielding, born at Sharpham Park near Glastonbury in 1707, is widely acknowledged as the parent of the modern police force. With a recent ancestry in Law, Henry practiced at the bar. He was appointed Commissioner of the Peace for Westminster in 1748, for Middlesex in 1749 returned to Westminster Quarter Sessions later that same year as Chairman. He founded a small body of unofficial police, organised them into foot and mounted patrols and they operated from his Bow Street office. From the start, he trained these men in principles of crime prevention and the removal of the causes of crime. When, in 1829, the Metropolitan Police Act brought the new Force into existence, the Bow Street patrols had reached 300 in number and they were absorbed into the new Force.

The Municipal Corporations Act of 1836 empowered authorities to introduce Police Forces in the larger Cities but elsewhere the Parochial Constable system remained. The Royal Commission of 1836 reported upon the best means to establish county constabularies. There was some support in towns in Somerset for the concept of a paid constabulary but the permissive County Police Act of 1839 brought more debate than decision at the December Quarter Sessions that year. At the adjourned debate, in the Spring of 1849, George Warry of Shapwick House, a barrister of the Chancery and Western Circuit and Chairman of Bridgwater County Justices championed the idea but there were to be years of debate with many petitions to Quarter Sessions against the move.

Warry was evidently nothing if not persistent and forced a further debate which went to a vote at the Spring Quarter Sessions at Wells on 18th March, 1856. The proposal - to establish a County Constabulary for Somersetshire - was carried by a 64 to 1 majority. At the same time, the County Police Bill was being debated in Parliament and a strenuous opponent, nationally and locally, was the MP for Bath, Capt. G. Treweeke-Scobell RN. His opposition was to be fruitless and the County & Borough Police Act., 1856 was passed making what had been, in 1839, optional, now obligatory. George Warry's earlier enthusiasm was repeated when he was appointed Chairman of the Committee set up at the Court of Quarter Sessions and he reported to the adjourned gathering in Taunton on 13th May, 1856. In a few weeks, he had set out all the requirements for the establishment of the Somersetshire Constabulary, including recommendations regarding numbers and rates of pay. The Quarter Sessions approved his principles but reduced both the numbers and payment for individual posts. Although Warry's list included Inspectors, none were initially appointed. The post of Chief Constable was relatively well remunerated, at £600 p.a. total of salary and expenses. The next rank, Chief Superintendent (effectively DCC) brought a total of £180 p.a.. Sergeants with extensive responsibilities in the absence of any Inspectors, were introduced at 21/- (£1.05p) a week and Constables at between 16/- & 18/- (.80p & .90p) per week.

On 21st May, 1856, the post of Chief Constable was advertised and there were nineteen candidates. One was from the Royal Navy, 11 from the Army and seven from other established police forces. The short list was the one Royal Navy man, three Army Officers and two with the police background. The chosen man as the first Chief Constable of the Force was Valentine Gould, 43 years old and appointed from the role of Sub-Inspector after 12 years in the Irish Constabulary. He was officially appointed by the meeting of the Court of Quarter Sessions at Taunton on 1st July, 1856. At that same Quarter Sessions meeting, the Justices decided that the Force Headquarters was to be at Bridgwater and set the new Chief Constable the task of making the arrangements necessary to establish the Force. They also moved to arrange a loan of £30,000 for the purchase of sites and the construction of 'Station Houses and Strong Rooms'. (To continue in the next, October, edition)

## **A History of the Somersetshire Constabulary - Part Two**

Following his appointment as the first Chief Constable of the Somersetshire Constabulary on 1st July, 1856, Valentine Goold set about preparing his report to the Justices of Quarter Sessions for the county. Although there were 20 Petty Sessional Divisions, he arrived at the recommendation of 14 Police Districts. There were, at the same time, moves being made to reduce the Petty Sessional Divisions to 16 but efforts to gain common boundaries with the new Chief Constable failed. The terms of the County & Borough Police Act of earlier that year were met by writing to the Mayors of the boroughs within the county, although Glastonbury had agreed to be included with the county from the outset. The responses from Wells brought that city's inclusion from October Quarter Sessions meeting and Yeovil were included a year later. Bridgwater declined to be incorporated in the county scheme.

With Bridgwater Borough determined to go its own way, the Quarter Sessions decided to change their earlier decision and to base the Headquarters of the new Force at Glastonbury. With three Superintendents, five Sergeants and 34 Constables appointed, the Force came into existence on 1st September, 1856. A report at the time acknowledged that there were no Station Houses and that the Lock-Ups inherited from the old Parochial Constable system all fell well short of the standards required under the Police Acts. The Chief Constable's recommendation for 14 Police Districts had been approved and the initial manpower was spread thinly across Districts centred on Weston (Bath, Temple Cloud, Long Ashton, Axbridge, Wells, Frome, Wincanton, Somerton, Bridgwater (without), Ilminster, Taunton, Williton, Milverton and Dunster. Recruitment carried on apace and six weeks after inception the Force numbered 135. Valentine Goold was given approval, at that early stage, to further increase the establishment by a Sergeant and nine Constables, to be based at Headquarters to provide support and relief duties to the Districts. All of the supervisory officers appointed at the inception of the Force were drawn from serving police officers from the earlier established City and County Forces.

Two Superintendents (1st Class) had been appointed from Staffordshire and Birmingham but both resigned soon afterwards because they could not fund the initial outlay for a horse and cart to meet their supervisory duties. The Justices were also in financial difficulty as their bid for a loan of £30,000 for the building programme, with the rates as the loan guarantee, was refused by the Exchequer Loan Commissioners and the Home Office would not intervene. After some desperate months of negotiation, the West of England Insurance Office in Exeter agreed to provide the loan but this was not settled until March, 1857. The focus of manning up the Police Districts started with those areas of the county nearest to Bristol and Bath. By the end of November, the strength had risen to 154 the Axbridge, Bridgwater, Taunton and Somerton Districts were manned up by December, with the Glastonbury Headquarters established. At the end of the year the full establishment of 222 had been accomplished and six weeks into 1857 all 14 Districts were manned.

Although recruitment does not seem to have been a problem, retention was another matter. Resignations and dismissals were frequent. In addition to his two senior colleagues, another Superintendent resigned in November, 1856, after less than three months. Dismissals were often instant and resignations took place within a few days, so the manpower was less than stable. Perhaps one of the reasons, but the discipline of the role was another, was that transfers were usually with only two days' notice. The earliest record of a disciplinary action was pencilled against a 2nd Class Constable in the Bridgwater District, revealed only by a deduction shown on the pay sheet for the officer in November, 1856. "Fine 10/- (.50p) stopped", when that Constable's weekly wage was 16/- (.80p). Staying the course into the new year brought reward for the third Superintendent appointed in September, 1856, when Philip Crampton was identified as the first DCC. He was to serve another three years in Somerset before being appointed as Chief Constable of Shropshire.

The role of the Superintendent in these early days was extremely hands-on and they travelled great distances on foot and by horse to supervise their men and lead crime investigations. There are frequent recordings of their horses becoming "unwell", as they were worn out with so much use. One bout of 'Cattle Plague' resulted in the Superintendent being so active that his horse died through being over-worked. In 1958, they were given additional tasks, as the former Inspectors of Weights & Measures were replaced by handing the role to the Superintendents. They received an additional allowance of £15 a year for this extra burden.

### **A History of the Somersetshire Constabulary - Part Three**

The first half of 1857, with the difficult negotiations for the advance of money resolved, saw the purchase of land and, as in Glastonbury & Ilminster of existing buildings, for police stations. At Ilminster, The Grapes Inn was bought for £1,020 and converted. It included a house for the Superintendent, several Constables and a Court Room and was still the local Police Station in 1956. In Taunton, land was bought from a local butcher and was “bordered on West by land in ownership of County whereon the new Shire Hall is building”. At Weston-super-Mare, with an allocation of only two Constables, part of the building occupied by the Town Commissioners, near the ‘old’ (now) Town Hall was rented and included two existing cells. The immediate consolidation with Yeovil Borough resulted in the Borough Police Station in Wine Street being taken over by the County Force and the Borough Council were paid a rent of £50 per annum. In an impressively active first twenty four months, most Districts had stations occupied by late in 1858. In that interim period, all police business was conducted from private dwellings. With most Constables in lodgings, this must have made life ‘interesting’ for their landladies! Each of the new District Police Stations included quarters for between one and three Constables and, as we have seen, some accommodated the Superintendent.

All Constables were, for administrative ease, allocated numbers from the start of the Force. P.C. 1 was Charles Mizzen. He was issued on 1st September, 1856, with a greatcoat, frock-coat, two pairs of trousers, stock & clasp, cape, hat, truncheon, girdle, lanthorn (sic), pair of handcuffs, button stick, brush, warrant card and Regulation book. The coats had an embroidered breast badge. Quite soon after the initial deployments, leggings were added to the list of equipment. This issue remained the same for all recruits until the July of 1875, when a helmet was issued for day wear, the hat remaining authorised wear for night duty. The suppliers of the helmets in 1875 were Christy of London, who were still the suppliers to the Force in its Centenary year.

In just over a year, a ‘point’ system had been established and included Constables meeting at pre-arranged times with those on adjoining Beats in neighbouring Forces. Although used as a supervisory conference point the real purpose was to provide a system of communication. The only other means to communicate were by letter and through the telegraph system that accompanied the new railway systems. On 29th October, 1857, the Court Justices at Wells wrote to the Somerset Central Railway imploring them to provide a telegraph link between Highbridge and Glastonbury.

The few years up until 1860 had been devoted to constructing the new Force and Valentine Goold and his immediate successor used the next couple of decades to consolidate that hurried birth of the Force. Discipline was strict, even harsh, but has to be placed in the context of the times, when very few working people would be seen as having other than a hard life by today’s standards. Diaries and ‘letter books’ have survived, together with the private notebooks of some Justices, to reveal something of what was happening at the time. A 1858 record of the Bishops Lydeard Petty Sessional Division, in the process of establishing a new Court House, show their village Constable in an excellent light. Thomas Eveleigh had joined on 11th June, 1857 and been posted to Bishops Lydeard that October. A native of North Petherton and a labourer before becoming a Police Officer, he had probably enjoyed very little formal education but was reported upon as having shown an “astute notion” of detecting crime and a presentation of convincing evidence which demonstrated he did not lack intelligence. In one case of opening too early on a Sunday at Lydeard St Lawrence, Eveleigh went to the Parish Constable (the old Parochial system apparently ran alongside the new County Police Force) to ‘ascertain the village time’ as an important part of his evidence for the offence committed by the licensee (the spread of the railways had evidently not yet impacted the national time by 1857).

## **A History of the Somersetshire Constabulary - Part Four**

The Superintendent for the Chewton District from 1857 until 1863 kept a record of his activities which has survived. He recorded a Highway Robbery at Brislington (which shows how the Bristol boundary has spread since the mid-19th Century) and of the escape of two prisoners from the Keynsham Lock-Up. He also reflects upon the difficulty in getting Justices of the Peace to hear cases - with all sorts of excuses being offered for not being able to make themselves available for Court. Assaults on the new police officers were not uncommon and could involve serious injury. This, together with the frequent efforts to stop 'Prize Fighting', is a reflection that this was a violent period in our history - the very reason that the 'new police' were required. That same Superintendent recorded some of his supervisory and court advocacy journeys, many on foot. It was, evidently, not uncommon for him to walk 20 miles in a, customarily long, day.

Dismissal was not only at the lowest rank and one Superintendent appointed in 1856 was 'removed' in 1860, having "failed to prove himself sincere, loyal and hard working". It seems that this action was justified from the 'jubilation' expressed by the local people and freely reported in the local press. He was replaced by Henry Gillbanks, who had joined as a Constable in November, 1856 and already been promoted to Sergeant (so much for accelerated promotion being seen as a child of the 1960s!). Gillbanks developed a high reputation in the role and was followed by a son, who also achieved Superintendent rank.

Not only police officers were expected to walk long distances. Prisoners were, in the main, walked from their court appearances to the prison in which they were to serve their sentence. They were escorted in relay and housed in police stations where the journey required. Use of the new railways for prisoner movement was only permitted where the prisoner was acknowledged to be "unable to walk".

Further evidence of the violent times came in the Chief Constable's report to Quarter Sessions in July, 1861, when he included the need to authorise that Constables be armed with cutlasses for night duty in some areas. He included his earnest desire not to use cutlasses unless absolutely necessary and this was, evidently, taken to heart by the District Commanders. Although three Constables in the Axbridge District had been so seriously injured as to warrant the payment of a £2 gratuity, the Superintendent reported a few years later that his men had never been issued with the cutlasses held at his station.

The 1860s & 1870s brought several bouts of serious disorder, usually linked with food shortages or parliamentary elections. It seems that the targets for mob attack were varied but included the members of the newly-formed Salvation Army in the 1880s. In 1867 rioting over the prices of meat and bread became widespread, affecting Street, Shepton Mallet, Chard, Ilminster, Frome, Castle Cary and Bruton. In Frome, 200 Special Constables were sworn in to support 50 Regular Officers in dealing with a mob of 3,000. The situation was resolved by the bakers reducing their prices - so rioting was not likely to have been seen as a fruitless exercise. It seems that the tradesmen of Ilminster did not take similar avoiding action and became targets of the mob there. A petition on 11th December, 1867 for recompense under Riot Damage law was summarily dismissed by the Justices - perhaps they, too, thought the prices had risen too far!

1868 brought extreme violence in Weston-super-Mare between Liberal and Tory supporters. I presume that the small local force was supported as there were eight arrested and charged. Election day, on 30th November, 1868, brought another violent disturbance on the streets of Highbridge. As the Force entered its third decade the authorised strength had risen to 293, perhaps in recognition of the need to quell such disorder, but, in 1872, the HMI reported the difficulties now being experienced in recruitment - "due to high wage rates in the labour market". He also reported that the Chard Borough Force, comprising two Constables (one of whom received an additional 1/-.05p) for each 'cry' as the Town Crier, was inefficient. Nonetheless, Chard held off from consolidating with the County Constabulary until forced by legislation on 1st April, 1889.

To those of us remembering the Bank Holiday skirmishes of the 1960s & 70s, August Bank Holiday 1882 shows that nothing much is original. The Axbridge Division (when the term Division came into use instead of District is not clear) fielded what must have been most of its authorised strength, two of whom went to Bath Military Tournament to assist. The small town Flower Shows and Fetes received much of the attention but the arrival of the boats at the Old Pier warranted three Constables.

## **A History of the Somersetshire Constabulary - Part Five**

There was, perhaps not surprisingly given the state of employment conditions elsewhere, little attention given to welfare issues and pensions were far from secure. Small amounts of leave (unspecified) were granted but when not actually on patrol Constables were expected to remain available in the vicinity of their stations. An order from the Chief Constable in respect of Bristol Races, a three day event, reflected some minor relaxation in an award of extra pay instead of feeding, with the officers carrying their own refreshments. It included that "beer or ale" would also be provided in the police tent! In January, 1881 Valentine Gould made another concession in allowing for shorter night shifts to be permitted during inclement weather.

When he retired at the end of June, 1884, the Chief Constable was replaced by Capt. C. G. Alison, who had been DCC in Lancashire. Two years later the precarious nature of the pension provision was revealed in an exchange of correspondence between Superintendent Thomas Morgan, of the Weston (Bath) Division and Capt. Alison. At 60 years of age, Morgan had a total of 37 years police service, having formerly served also in Lancashire. Included in his resignation letter was the request, "in the hope that you will be pleased at the next Quarter Sessions to recommend me to the Justices for such an allowance as you may consider I am, by my age and service, entitled to receive". Capt. Alison's response is encouraging only to the extent of summoning the Superintendent to attend the meeting at The Swan at Wells on 19th October, 1886. There is no record of what award was granted.

The overseeing role of the Justices at Quarter Sessions toward the administration of the police continued until the Local Government Act of 1888 established Standing Joint Committees. These committees were half Justices and half Local Councillors in composition, so the Magistracy retained some significant role.

In 1891 the Divisional Headquarters for the area was moved from Axbridge to Weston-super-Mare, presumably a reflection of the growth of the sea-side resort. The Superintendent and his immediate staff moved in to the Police Station in Oxford Street. After 35 years of the Somersetshire Constabulary, this was the first move of a Divisional Headquarters. By 1898 the strength at Weston-super-Mare had grown to three Sergeants and 12 Constables, with another Sergeant and three Constables added just as the Century closed. There were two Constables at this time at Burnham on Sea and they were also appointed as 'Assistant Inspectors of Nuisance', apparently to deal with ships arriving with cholera on board!

The Boar War saw the recall to the colours of 15 reservists now Constables but the Local Government Act of 1890 had not allowed for such military service to count toward their police pensions. The Chairman of the Standing Joint Committee and the Chief Constable both petitioned the Home Secretary on behalf of such officers. Their requests, no doubt supported by others from elsewhere in the country, resulted in the Police Reservists Act, 1902 which enabled the Standing Joint Committee to adopt a solution at their meeting on 6th April, 1903, although the agreement to secure the service of officers was not unanimous.

## **A History of the Somersetshire Constabulary - Part Six**

After 24 years service to Somerset, Capt. Alison retired on 31st May, 1908, to be replaced by Capt. H. C. Metcalfe, previously Chief Constable of West Suffolk and the West Riding of Yorkshire. One of the new Chief Constable's early tasks was to implement the Standing Joint Committee's decision to move the Headquarters of the Force to Taunton. The Committee had decided upon the Governor's House and administrative offices of the old and disused prison and the transfer of Force Headquarters was completed in October, 1909. Earlier that year, during what must have been his planning stages of the Headquarters move, Capt. Metcalfe approached the Standing Joint Committee regarding his access to a car to aid his supervision in the county. The response of the Committee was to increase the Chief Constable's travel allowance from £100 to £190 a year for him to buy and maintain a car. The result was the first police car in the Force, a Wolseley 12/16 Tourer, registration number Y1241.

Through the years until 1910 it had been the practice of the Standing Joint Committee to make small payments, on the recommendation of the Chief Constable, to Officers for meritorious acts. In that year they decided to cease this practice but the Chairman, Lord Hylton, invested money into a fund for the Chief Constable to continue to make such awards. Earl Waldegrave and Mr. R. E. Dickenson, from Bath, were the first Trustees of the Fund. In 1933 this trusteeship passed to the Charity Commissioners. No award was made over the sum of £5 and some of the recipients were also decorated for their actions.

Although the original recommendation from the first Chief Constable had included Inspectors, none were appointed until April, 1910, when six Sergeants were promoted into this rank. During the Coal Strike in 1911, 35 Officers from the Force were sent on aid to the Glamorgan Constabulary and deployed in the Rhondda Valleys. The Weekly Rest Day Act of 1910 permitted the Standing Joint Committee to allow Officers one day off each week but they did not choose to implement this provision in Somerset until the July of 1914 - by which time other matters for concern were looming. On the outbreak of what was to become World War I, 24 Constables who were reservists were recalled and 14 others volunteered as Drill Instructors. Eventually 121 members of the Force joined up, including the Chief Constable, who resumed his Army Rank in the Infantry. By 1918, he had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and had won a DSO & Bar. The only holder of the Victoria Cross in the Force after the War was PC141 Wilfred Dolby Fuller, who joined the Somersetshire Constabulary in 1919 after his War Service in the Grenadier Guards.

The, largely enabling, Police Act of 1890 had been implemented quite differentially across the country and there were many petitions to Quarter Session Divisions, many relating to police officers' pay. The Desborough Committee reported and the Police Act of 1919 resulted. Its objective was to stabilise conditions of service, pay and pensions. There also resulted the introduction of the Police Federation of England & Wales and a number of Somerset Officers served on the Central Committee over the ensuing years. Some estimate of the need for this Act can be gauged from the example of a Constable in 1902 who died from injuries he received while performing his duty. He had nearly 11 years service and his widow was awarded a pension of £15 a year plus £2/10/- (£2.50p) for each of their three children. Even in 1902, a total of £22/10/- (£22.50p) was not much of an annual income. Locally the benefits from the 1919 Act were recognised as still falling short of security for those families who had lost their breadwinner and, in 1928, the Widows' Supplementary Pension Fund was started and provided, initially, an additional sum of £39 per year to widows.

## **A History of the Somersetshire Constabulary - Part Seven**

Following the cessation of hostilities in 1918, the Force started upon significant changes to its structure. With only minor boundary adjustments the 14 Districts set out in 1856 had remained until this time. In June, 1920 the Weston (Bath) and Temple Cloud (Chewton) Divisions were merged to form a new Weston Division. In April, 1922 the remaining Divisions were re-grouped into seven, with their Divisional Headquarters at Dunster, Frome, Glastonbury, Long Ashton, Taunton, Weston-super-Mare and Yeovil. At the same time further efforts were made to consolidate the Bridgwater Borough Force but agreement could not be reached. The changes brought a reduction in the number of Superintendents down to eight by April, 1923, although six vacant posts in this rank were held on the authorised strength of the Force until this was rectified in 1928. On 31st December, 1928 the authorised establishment of the Force was one Chief Constable, eight Superintendents, seven Inspectors, 46 Sergeants and 303 Constables, a total of 365.

In the early stages of the restructured Force came the General Strike of 1926 but, perhaps a little prematurely, Colonel Metcalfe reported in June that the county remained peaceful and that the conduct of the miners in the Somerset Coalfield area had been "exemplary". He had identified no need for drafting in additional Officers to the mining areas in the north of the county. In October of 1926 an explosive device was found near the pit head winding gear at Radstock Colliery and there was obviously some need to lend support to the local Officers. This was to prove to be the last occasion upon which the Mounted Section was deployed. This Section had been dispersed across the Force area and their duties had, largely, been as orderlies for the Divisional Superintendent - using his horse! A total of 14 could be assembled. With the gradual additions of motor vehicles, the traps had been, finally, withdrawn in 1922 but the Section, of a Sergeant and 13 Constables, had been retained, using privately owned horses from two centres and with the Officers normally engaged in foot patrols.

From the withdrawal of the traps in 1922, Superintendents were authorised to hire cars where their supervisory duties made this necessary but, steadily, they bought and used their own vehicles. Following the Road Traffic Act of the previous year, in 1931 the Road Traffic Department was established. It consisted of one Sergeant, based at the Taunton Headquarters and a total of 14 Constables, based two at each Divisional Station. At this same time an embryonic Criminal Investigation Department began to form and was officially sanctioned by the Standing Joint Committee at the Quarter Session Meeting in December, 1932. Initially comprising a Detective Sergeant and Constable (clerk) at Headquarters and one D.S. at each of the Weston-super-Mare and Yeovil Divisions, the numbers were increased following the official authorisation to five D.S. and five D.C. posts working in pairs from Headquarters and four of the Divisions. Soon afterwards the nearest Forensic Science Laboratory was established by the Bristol City Police and the Somerset Force used those facilities. In 1938, the Standing Joint Committee approved a subscription of £160 for the year towards the cost of maintaining the laboratory.

By 1937 the Force had a Detective Inspector. D.I. Webber was closely involved in research into latent fingerprints and awarded a BEM for his work. In that year, he was promoted to Detective Superintendent and D.S. Arnold was promoted to D.I. and Webber's deputy. Mr. Arnold would later become the Chief Constable of Cambridge-shire. Soon after the start of World War II, the C.I.D. was expanded significantly to cope with requirements for security and the monitoring of aliens. In 1945 the Special Branch aspects would be scaled down but the normal C.I.D. functions were expanded.

## **A History of the Somersetshire Constabulary - Part Eight**

From 1931 the training of recruits had been structured on a ten week course at the Birmingham City Police School but in the crisis years leading up to World War II, recruits were trained at Mountfields where the pavilion was converted into classrooms. The Training within the Force was to become somewhat more a recognised Department when, in 1942, an additional Inspector post was created as Force Training Officer for the Regular and various Auxiliary members of the Force. On the eve of War, Colonel Metcalfe retired and was replaced by J. E. Ryall OBE, Chief Constable of the East Riding of Yorkshire. Mr. Ryall came with experience from serving in the Indian Police and as a former Assistant Inspector General of Police in the Punjab. He had been engaged in the Afghan War and held the North West Frontier Medal, MBE and the Kings Police Medal for Gallantry. In December, 1939 a few reservists were recalled to the Colours and over the next 18 months a total of 100 enlisted in the Armed Services. Many were to return with various honours earned but 10 were to be killed in action.

Between 1939 and 1943 the north of the county was frequently hit by air-raid attacks and the police stations at both Radstock and Whit church sustained damage. With the main focus of these attacks on Bristol, Bath, Weston-super-Mare and Yeovil also received the devastating attention. Somerset Officers were drafted in to Bristol and Bath to assist and on the night of 26th/27th April, 1942, Constable 253 Kenneth Snook was killed on such duty. Despite the loss of manpower to the military effort, the war duties increased and included the enforcement of emergency legislation, air-raid precautions, billeting arrangements and the guarding of vulnerable points. An augmentation of the available manpower was necessary and this was achieved in several ways. The Special Constabulary was supplemented by the First Police Reserve, Police War Reservists and Women's Auxiliary Police Corps, combining to almost double the former peace-time availability.

The Special Constabulary had a long, although broken, history, having first emerged under the short-lived Special Constabulary Act of 1673. In 1831, the new Special Constabulary Act had authorised Justices, under restricted circumstances, to temporarily enlist men as Special Constables and this included powers of compulsory enrolment. Before the creation of the Somersetshire Constabulary, these powers had been exercised several times to deal with riotous behaviour. The most notable was in the Spring of 1839 in Radstock, when over a three week period the numbers of such Specials rose to a total of 621. After the Regular Force had been introduced, the powers were still called upon, such as at Ilminster and South Petherton in the early Summer of 1867 to quell food riots. Through this time the appointment of Special Constables was limited to the duration of a specific need but at the outbreak of World War I, the Special Constabulary Act, 1914 allowed Justices to appoint regardless of any current problem.

Labour problems in 1921 prompted the recruitment of significant numbers of Special Constables and Brigadier R. Lock was appointed as County Commander of Special Constabulary and he was to remain in office until 1942. He was, in part, replaced by Capt. R. M. E. Reeves, although the Chief Constable retained overall control and Capt. Reeves was identified as Area Commander for Coastal Divisions. After World War II, Capt. Reeve remained as Deputy Commander for the Special Constabulary until, in 1951, this role became identified as County Commandant.

The Mounted Section was partially reassembled in 1942, mainly for communications purposes, but was again disbanded in 1945. In 1953 a small Mounted Section was raised within the Bridgwater Division for patrol on Exmoor.

## **A History of the Somersetshire Constabulary - Part Nine**

The Bridgwater Borough Police had pre-dated the County Force by many years, having been established in 1839, with an initial annual Force budget of £50, under the Municipal Corporations Act, 1835. The two Constables appointed replaced the 'paid watch' that had existed for some time even prior to 1839. By March, 1850 the Force had grown to one Superintendent and four Constables, the senior officer working days and all the Constables working night shifts. The role of the Superintendent incorporated that of Gaoler, Billeting Master, High Constable and Inspector of Lodging Houses for the Borough, he was, oddly, paid only 11/6d (57.5p) a week for his police role but £110 per annum for his other duties. The Constables each were paid 15/- (75p) a week in 1839, rising to 18/- (90p) by 1854. Whether connected with the forthcoming commencement of the County Force is not clear but the HMI carried out an inspection of the Borough Force in the Summer of 1857 and did not report favourably regarding its efficiency or adequacy in numbers. Perhaps as a result of their determination not to be ameliorated into the County Force, the strength of the Borough Force was gradually increased, to twelve by 1873, the year in which a new police station opened in High Street, Bridgwater.

On 31st July, 1884, the Watch Committee decided that the Officers of the Bridgwater Borough Police, supported by volunteers, would form a Borough Fire Brigade. A crisis loomed in 1896, when a strike of brickworks employees led to rioting in the Borough. The disturbances were such that military personnel were drafted in to the town from Plymouth but the Borough Watch Committee still had to turn to the County Chief Constable and mutual aid was provided from 3rd July, 1896. Soldiers and Somersetshire Constabulary personnel were housed together in the Town Hall. The Mayor, Alderman Pollard, read the Riot Act declaration and the mob were dispersed by the combined police forces wielding their batons. It appears that the soldiers were not deployed, although it is unlikely that the rioters were ignorant of their immediate availability.

Development of the Bridgwater Borough Police did not stand still into the 20th Century and the Force moved into a new Police Station in Northgate in 1911. Although the Aldermen of the Borough had resisted for so many years, the Bridgwater Borough Police were consolidated with the County Constabulary in October, 1940. The authorised establishment of the Somersetshire Constabulary was increased by the same number as the existing strength of the Borough Force, 20 Officers.

With too many urgent issues to address during the War years it was not until June 1946 that further restructuring of the Force was seen as appropriate. The exception, perhaps brought to note by the role of the Women's Auxiliary Police Corps, was approval, given in September, 1942, to appoint four Policewomen. This was not acted upon immediately and the first of the four Regular female appointments was Woman Police Constable Yandall on 22nd January, 1944. Thirty months later the establishment of female officers was raised to one Inspector, two Sergeants and 10 Constables and, in 1948 it rose again to a total of 23, that figure still being the level at the Centenary of the Force. More widely, the authorised establishment of the Force was raised by 50 in 1947, with 41 of those justified to cover abstractions identified for rest days, annual leave and training.

## **A History of the Somersetshire Constabulary - Part Ten**

On Christmas Eve in 1949 the Information Room opened at Taunton. The Home Office had agreed that, within overall establishment, four new Sergeant posts be created to supervise this new facility. The 'large' office had access to all Force operational records and included the 'radio room'. Two-way radio had first been mooted by the Home Office in June of 1942 but there had been no work undertaken until late in 1946. A survey of Somerset produced a need for three hill-top relay sites and they were established at Charterhouse, Middleton Court and Cranmore. The work involved meant that the radio scheme did not come into operational use until 18th August, 1952 - two days after the awful flood disaster at Lynmouth.

The availability of radio massively increased the efficiency of the Road Traffic Department, which was reorganised to make best use of this deployment tool and to respond to the increases being experienced in traffic on the roads. The emphasis within the Department was heavily upon presenting the best example and educating the motoring public. By the Centenary celebrations within the Force, the Somersetshire Constabulary had 27 radio equipped patrol cars. To support the new radio technology after it had been established through the three hill-top sites, the Home Office opened the regional radio workshops at Shapwick.

War restrictions in respect of building work had produced, by the late 1940s, a poor representation of the Force in its Police Stations and Houses. The only work seen as sufficiently essential during the War had been the reconstruction, in 1942, of the Headquarters buildings at Taunton. The removal of those restrictions brought considerable building activity in the ten years after the War. By 1956 there had been built 158 houses, two flats and three flats were created in the old Taunton Police Station. Some of the difficulties experienced by officers and their families during moves between police houses were mitigated by the new stock being to a common general pattern. Local Authorities also helped by allocating a total of 36 houses for rental by the Police Authority. Although many of the Divisional and Section Stations that had been in existence since the inception of the Force remained, Home Office Capital Expenditure Limits curtailed much of the attention these buildings would, otherwise, have received. The exceptions here were the new Frome Divisional Headquarters, opened in April, 1954, and the Sub-Divisional Station at Wells that was under construction at the time of the Centenary of the Force.

In January, 1955 Mr. Ryall retired in poor health and was only to live until the November of that year. His replacement, formerly ACC of Buckinghamshire, was Kenneth Walter Lawrence Steele KPM, who was to prove to be the last Chief Constable of the Somersetshire Constabulary. Upon the Centenary of the Force, the authorised establishment stood at 620 officers. Less than another 11 years was left before the Force combined with the City of Bath Police in 1967 and, seven years later to form part of the Avon and Somerset Constabulary. K. W. L. Steele was to be Chief Constable of both the Somerset and Bath and the Avon and Somerset Forces, retiring in 1979.