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THE POLICE IN LATE VICTORIAN BRISTOL

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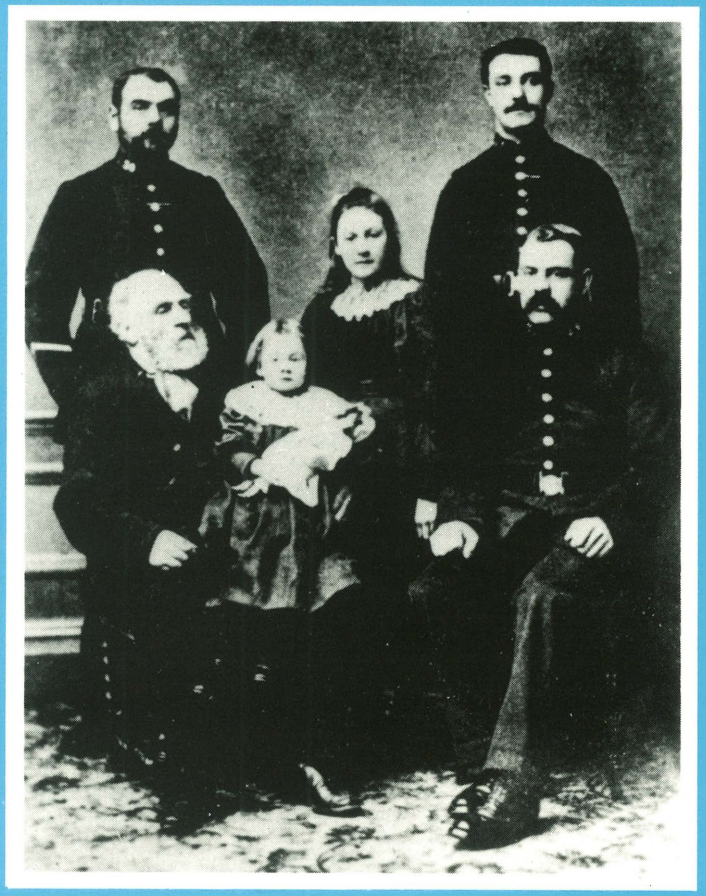

BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

LOCAL HISTORY PAMPHLETS

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The Police in Late Victorian Bristol is the seventy-first pamphlet to be published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. The author is a History graduate of the University of Bristol and a headmaster in a Bristol school.

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The photograph on the front cover shows two children, Ruby Brown age 12 and Elsie Brown age 3, who were thrown from Clifton Suspension Bridge into the River Avon on 18 September 1896, a drop of 245 feet. They survived and were rescued by James Hazell, pilot, P.C. Baker, P.C. Toogood and P.C. Wise.

The Bristol Branch of the Historical Association wishes to express its gratitude to Sergeant Mike Pegler of the Community Involvement Department who supplied a number of photographs. They are reproduced by kind permission of the Avon and Somerset Constabulary. The photograph of the horse-drawn fire engine and of the constables engaged in cutlass drill are taken from copies in the Bristol Record Office and are reproduced by kind permission of Mr John Williams, the City Archivist. Mr Gordon Kelsey of the University Arts Faculty Photographic Unit was as always most helpful in preparing the photographs for publication.

The next pamphlet in the series will be by Jon Press and Charles Harvey and will deal with the remarkable achievements of Sir George White.

The publication of a pamphlet by the Branch does not necessarily imply the Branch's approval of the opinions expressed in it.

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THE POLICE IN LATE VICTORIAN BRISTOL

In June 1836 the new Bristol Constabulary comprising 228 men commenced its duties in the city. By 1900 the force had increased to 500 men. The expansion of the force was in response to a continuous increase in the population of the city and the amount of property to be protected. The new industries, which included tobacco, printing, cotton, chocolate and shoemaking, and the upsurge in house building, especially in Clifton and Redland, together with the city boundary extension of 1897, which absorbed Stapleton, St. George and parts of Horfield, Westbury, Brislington and Bedminster, all helped to bring about the need for an expanding police force.[1]

In response to the growth of the size of the force in the late Victorian period, the increased commitments brought about by the boundary extensions and pay-increases, expenditure on the police continued to increase. It rose from £29,874 per annum in 1878 to £32,258 in 1888 and £37,540 by 1898. While a grant from the Home Office covered half police expenditure, Bristol was almost entirely independent of the Home Secretary. An elected body, the Watch Committee, governed the Bristol police. The Committee appointed a Chief Constable as Head of the force. Any decisions made by the latter could be overruled by the former.

A Police Act of 1856 was intended to bring greater unity to police forces, but the Metropolis, boroughs and counties operated their forces under different legislation, and there was strong political pressure to oppose the establishment of a national police. Real power was vested in the Bristol Watch Committee to determine police policy and maintain efficiency. The Watch Committee comprised a chairman, usually the Mayor, and fourteen aldermen and councillors.

1. See appendix, p. 28.

The members of the Watch Committee were predominantly well-to-do businessmen. During the 1880–1900 period, approximately 75% of Bristol Councillors were industrialists, merchants and tradesmen. Several members in particular were prominent in the Watch Committee. Aldermen R.H. Symes, "churchman, Conservative, Sheriff of Bristol, 1887 J.P.,"[2] acted as chairman during his period as Mayor. Other members included E.B. James, "Managing Director, Edwards, Roger & Biggs Ltd., Tobacco Manufacturers, Bristol";[3] H. Ashman, "Justice of the Peace, Liberal, City Magistrate . . . a man keen and successful in business, who finds much time for public service";[4] W. Pethick, "Justice of the Peace, Liberal . . . partner in the Bristol South American Importing House of Haycroft and Pethick";[5] J.S. Fry, "J.P., Liberal, President of the Adult Quaker School . . . partner in the firm of J.S. Fry & Sons, director of the Bristol Carriage Works Company";[6] J. Bartlett, "Conservative, Managing Director of Bartlett Iron Founders Ltd., Chairman of Western Waggon Co. Ltd.";[7] J.Dix, "J.P., Conservative . . . solicitor, Chairman of the Bristol Gas Co.";[8] J.Inskipp," solicitor, Conservative . . . Chairman of the Taff Vale Railway Company . . . Churchman,";[9] W. Terrett, "Liberal, member of the Bible Christian Methodist Church . . . (who) devotes much of his time to religious effort";[10] and C.E. Gardner, "J.P., Liberal, senior partner in the firm of Gardner, Thomas & Co., Grocers, . . . Wesleyan and local preacher."[11] In 1894 Frank Sheppard joined the Committee as its first Labour member. He was to play a leading role in the Watch Committee during the twentieth century. To these men the Chief Constable was directly responsible. Since the appointment of the first head of the force in 1836, Joseph Bishop, the Watch Committee made its desire clear to emulate the structure and achievements of the Metropolitan force. The first five heads of the Bristol

2. Pike W., *Contemporary Biographies*, Bristol, 1899. p. 45.
3. *ibid.*, p. 68.
4. W. Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 250.
5. W. Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
6. W. Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
7. W. Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
8. W. Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
9. A. Freeman, *Bristol Worthies*, 1909, p. 182.
10. W. Pike, *op. cit.* p. 67.
11. W. Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

Top: The Chief Constables of Bristol 1885–1906
Bottom: Horse-drawn fire engine used by the police

police were experienced, professional police officers from the Metropolitan force.[12]

On 8 November 1876 the Watch Committee resolved that the Head of Police be given the new title of 'Chief Constable'. The responsibilities of the first man to hold this title, E.W. Coathupe, were considerable. The 1894 *Police Instruction Book* pronounced

12. They were Joseph Bishop, 20 May 1836 – 5 May 1838; Lt. Henry Fisher, 30 May 1838 – 21 June 1856; J.S. Handcock, 22 June 1856 – 4 March 1876; E.W. Coathupe, 8 March 1876 – 27 June 1894; and Henry Allbutt, 11 September 1894 – 19 September 1906.

that "the whole of the force will be under his command and he will be held responsible for its discipline and efficiency . . . He shall attend all meetings of the Watch Committee and present reports, books and accounts as the committee may from time to time order to be placed before them for their inspection."

The structure of the force commanded by the chief constable closely followed the Metropolitan model. In 1876 Bristol adopted the four lettered divisions A–D, introduced in the Metropolitan force in 1869. 'A' Division, the largest, contained the centre of the city. Since 1844 Bridewell Street premises had served as A Division station and police headquarters. 'B' Division to the south, possessed a station on the Bedminster turnpike road leading from the harbour bridge. 'C' Division took in the north-west area with a station at the foot of Brandon Hill on Jacob's Wells Road, and 'D' Division encompassed the eastern area of the city. Its station in Trinity Road, St. Philips was completed in 1869. It became clear during the 1880's that the Bedminster and Clifton stations were too small, and in the latter case in the wrong place. In 1882 a new fortress-like police station was built in East Street at a cost of £5,978 4s 3d to serve Bedminster. The Watch Committee built an elegant red brick station in 1891 in Lower Redland Road for the Clifton and Redland areas. The extension of the city boundaries in the late 1890's resulted in six police stations in Fishponds, Eastville, Horfield, Two Mile Hill, Stapleton and Totterdown to be absorbed into the network.

Each Division was commanded by a Superintendent responsible for the maintenance of discipline, the good order of stations, the arrangement for beat duties, hours and tours of duty and the change of reliefs.[13]

The Watch Committee decided that an Inspector should be "responsible for the general conduct and good order of the Sergeants under him. The Inspector when on patrol duty is to see as much of the division as possible."[14] It was advisable for a

13. The divisional organisation in 1892 was as follows: 'A' Division, 1 Chief Constable, 11 Inspectors, 1 Chief Superintendent, 12 Sergeants, 130 Constables (total 155); 'B' Division, 1 Superintendent, 3 Inspectors, 11 Sergeants, 66 Constables (total 81); 'C' Division, 1 Superintendent, 3 Inspectors, 11 Sergeants, 65 Constables (total 80); 'D' Division, 1 Superintendent, 2 Inspectors, 10 Sergeants, 64 Constables (total 77). Total strength, 393.
14. *Police Instruction Book*, 1894, p. 12.

constable on night duty to be seen to be checking that doors and windows were secured when he heard the approach of the Inspector's horse. Inspectors attended the Police Court to assist constables, and during the absence of the Superintendent, the duty Inspector assumed control of the Division. It was customary for one Inspector to supervise the work of three sergeants. Each sergeant commanded a section of between 6–8 constables. Sergeants marched and drilled, practised cutlass drill, inspected uniforms and equipment and read out instructions to men on parade in strict army fashion. They marched at the head of a section to replace constables coming off beat duty in the manner of the medieval Watch.

Working conditions for the Victorian constable were arduous. In 1872 the Watch Committee reduced the hours of service for a Bristol constable from ten hours to eight hours per day, in two four hour spells, but breaks for meals and refreshments were not allowed before 1899. Constables could expect to spend up to 15 minutes before and after duty parading and writing reports.

Higher ranks worked longer hours, Sergeants and Inspectors sometimes completing ten to twelve hour shifts. Leave, compared with other borough police forces, was poor. The Watch Committee recorded in 1876 "Each constable and sergeant receives ten days leave during the year. The men have to work seven days a week . . . in many large towns police forces are allowed one day in every month in addition to their yearly leave."[15] In July 1896 the Committee decided that "Every member of the Bristol force should be given one day's leave each month in addition to an annual leave of seven days."[16] Nevertheless the 19 days leave each year compared unfavourably with that of the average English Victorian policeman who had 26 days off per year and 10 days annual holiday.[17]

The constable's workday was centred almost entirely around his beat. In an age of slow communications and few police stations the beat system had certain advantages, but its main weakness was its inflexibility. A Bristol constable was supposed to patrol at the rate of two and a half miles per hour and to walk an average of twenty miles per day. Anyone who required assistance could by remaining

15. *Watch Committee Reports*, September 1876.
16. *Bristol Constabulary Centenary Brochure*, 1936, p. 29
17. Martin J. & Wilson G. *The Police – A Study in Manpower*, 1969, p. 10.

at a point of the beat, meet the regular constable or know by his routine in which street he could be found at a particular time during the day. Constables were told "do not loiter on your Beat; and abstain from idle gossip. You must make yourself perfectly acquainted with all the streets and thoroughfares, courts and houses situated within your Beat, and you must regularly visit each part."[18]

In 1884 thirty-six 'Beat Cards' were being used by constables in 'D' Division. The cards gave exact directions and times of arrival in specific streets. Thus St. George's daytime beat specified "Thirty minutes to Edward Street. One hour to Cannon Street, one hour, thirty-five minutes to Lippiatt Road. Finish." The Beat Cards show that a Bristol constable's patch was between 9–12 miles long and he had to walk two beats per day.

Particular beats such as the 'Jeweller's Beat', which required a visit to the jewellers shops in the old city of Bristol, and the 'Quay Beat' which included the docks and St. Augustine's parish could be especially dangerous and constables patrolled in pairs. The notebook of Sergeant Davis records that during the 1880s he supervised constables on 15 separate night patrols in central Bristol.

The night beats were unpopular. Sergeant Davis had to be careful to rotate day and night time beats for each of his constables. In the dim gas-lit, narrow cobblestoned streets of Victorian Bristol, a honeycomb of blind courts and alleyways, a constable was isolated and vulnerable. Any constable found leaving his beat without good reason would, as likely as not, be dismissed from the force.

Perhaps the most arduous aspect of the force, particularly for the new recruit, was the pervasive discipline of police life. Discipline throughout the Victorian period remained extremely strict and punishments imposed were arbitrary. Dismissals were common, and although the members of the force had the right of appeal to the Watch Committee, on no occasion in the 1870–1900 period did the committee revoke the Chief Constable's decision to dismiss a man from the force.

The most common police 'crime' during these years was drunkenness. The majority of recruits who entered the Bristol police were agricultural labourers from the country,

18. *Police Instruction Book*, 1894, p. 23.

mainly from Somerset and, to a lesser extent, from Gloucestershire.[19] They were men in their early twenties who had been used to hard drinking, some of it as payment in kind from the farmer employer.

The Watch Committee minutes record many instances of punishments meted out to constables who had been drinking between shifts. Entries such as "P.C. 94C has been reduced to the fourth class and P.C. 37C reduced to the third class and transferred to 'B' Division for being drunk"[20] were fairly common. A fine or reduction in rank was the usual punishment but the persistent drinker was dismissed.[21] The Watch Committee discouraged any link with the consumption of drink trade. In 1884 they dismissed Sergeant Board because he married a woman who kept a beer house.

For the offence of being absent without leave the punishment could be even more severe. Thus, "P.C. Henry Coles was sent to prison for seven days with hard labour. Magistrates were of the opinion that it was a serious offence for a constable to absent himself."[22]

Insubordination, idling, or neglect of duty were as misdemeanours punishable by dismissal. Thus, "P.C. 44B J. Salmon was reported for idling on his beat and making a false report . . . ordered to resign."[23]

Monetary difficulties and debts, which in the next century would be considered welfare problems, were other offences punishable by dismissal. Occasionally a constable would be given no specific reason at all for dismissal. Thus, "P.C. 41C Thomas Wilcox was reprimanded for being quite useless as a policeman . . . ordered to resign in a week."[24]

During the 1880–1900 period, 259 men left the force. Of these 110 either resigned or were dismissed Without the incentive of a pension to keep men in the force, it is probable the figure would have been higher. Promotions remained generally slow, but varied according to ability or good fortune.

19. B.S. Howell, *The Development of the Bristol Police Force 1880–1945*, M. Litt. dissertation, Bristol University, 1983, p. 16.
20. *Watch Committee Minutes*, 8 January 1879.
21. *Notebook of Sergeant Davis*, 'A' Division, 1877–1887.
22. *Western Daily Press*, 30 April 1884.
23. *Watch Committee Minutes*, 21 April 1880.
24. *Watch Committee Minutes*, 10 November 1880.

The Police *Register of Conduct Book 1872–1906* shows that promotions through the constable classes usually depended upon length of service. Recruits joined as sixth class constables and received promotion each year through six scales to first class. For a few promotion was rapid. Alexander Bruce joined the force in 1887, being a farm labourer aged 21 years. He was promoted to sergeant in 1895, Inspector in 1896 and Superintendent in 1900. George Foley, a dairyman, joined the force in May 1884 and became Inspector in April 1903. Inspector Parfitt received his promotion after only six years of service. And most dramatically of all, James Cann, a Somerset porter, joined the force in 1872 aged 21 years, rapidly scaled the promotion ladder and became Bristol's Chief Constable in October 1906. But such men were exceptional. Charles Prescott was more typical. He joined in April 1874 and retired in 1900 as a third class constable.

Before the establishment of the Police Federation in 1919, policemen were denied any formal means of expressing discontent concerning the slow promotion rate, discipline, pay and conditions, but the number of men who resigned suggests that there were grievances. Poor wages remained a major cause of discontent in Bristol and in other police forces. A small pay rise in 1878 gave constables between 22 shillings to 28 shillings per week, Sergeants received between 32 shillings to 34 shillings, Inspectors' pay was increased from 42 shillings to 47 shillings per week, and the Chief Constable's salary from £430 to £600.

During the 1880's wages remained static, below the Metropolitan rates but slightly above the national average. Monetary rewards from the Watch Committee and Magistrates for 'prompt and diligent action', and tips from members of the public, helped to increase pay, while the practice of 'moonlighting' remained common well into the twentieth century.

Pressure for an increase in pay from the sergeant and constable ranks grew throughout the 1880's. The small pay increase of 1878 had done little to alleviate the hardship of married constables with families. A feeling of militancy and demands for a 'right to confer' began to manifest themselves, not only in Bristol, but in many borough forces. The Metropolitan police strike of 1872 and the more widespread strike of 1890 stemmed from a rejection of demands from the ranks to form a trade union of policemen to improve wages, secure longer periods of leave and a pension for all policemen as a right. In October 1889 the Watch Committee received, "applications from the sergeants and constables for a pay

rise."[25] The petition from the men came as a result of a meeting held at the Colston Hall at which grievances were raised concerning pay and promotion procedures. While the strikes of 1872 and 1890 were not actively supported in Bristol, general dissatisfaction among the sergeant and constable ranks clearly existed.

In 1892 the Watch Committee agreed to award a pay increase of 8 per cent for which the men had pressed. During the last decade of the century the Committee established an embryonic welfare scheme. Widows and children of deceased policemen could receive a gratuity of between £25 to £50. In March 1899 work began on the building of an orphanage for police children in Stapleton, and in May 1899 the Watch Committee opened a home for retired policemen.

Other improvements occurred. In 1896 the Watch Committee discontinued the practice of lodging single constables in police stations, and in 1893 policemen were allowed to vote in municipal elections. A Police Act of 1890 made pensions a right for policemen who had displayed loyalty. All policemen received a pension by right after 25 years of service. Any man who lost his job through injuries received through his duties received a pension.

The last years of the Victorian period in Bristol witnessed a time when a job in the police force became a worthwhile career. During a period of stable cost of living, policemen were comparatively well off, with pay and conditions equal to those of a skilled workman. The job offered respectability, warm clothes, prospects of promotion, a reasonable income and now the certainty of a pension. The Watch Committee found no difficulty in obtaining recruits to maintain the size of the force. All recruits had to be literate, under forty years of age, with a minimum height of 5 foot 7 inches, active, of good character and able to pass a medical examination before enrolment as a probationary constable. They received a rudimentary training, one month's instruction in drill discipline, police duties and visits to the police court under the supervision of an Inspector, followed by one month on reserve duty at a police station, during which time the probationer spent part of the day doing such lowly tasks as window cleaning, fire lighting and making tea.

The recruit was then attached to an experienced constable and taken out on beat duty. Three months after he joined, the recruit

25. *Watch Committee Minutes*, 16 October 1889.

became a sixth class constable, was posted to a division, given a beat card and sent out on his own.

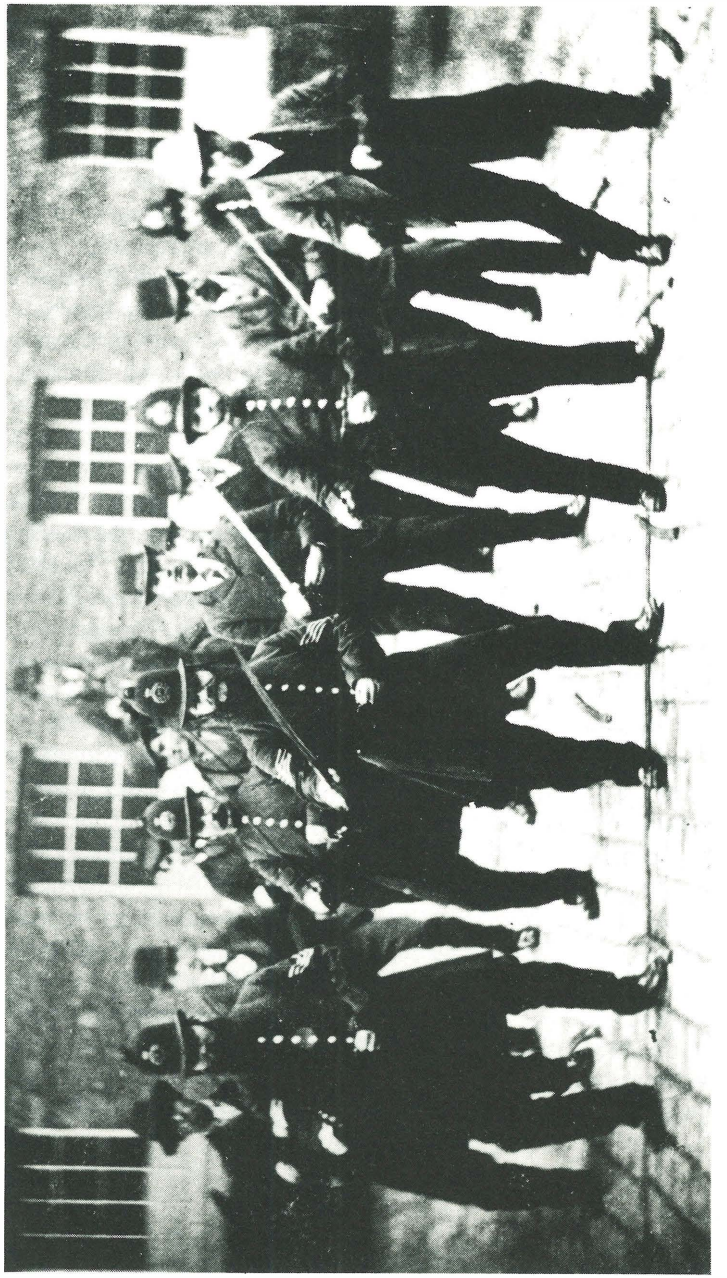
Constables possessed few aids to assist them in their duties. Apart from their uniforms and helmets which had replaced top hats in 1865, truncheons and handcuffs, they were virtually devoid of equipment. Firearms were rarely seen during the Victorian period. The Home Secretary intervened in March 1900 to prevent the proposed formation of a corps of Bristol police riflemen, but the Bridewell arsenal maintained a stock of lead-topped staves, cutlasses and pistols. Rattles had been employed earlier in the century as a means of calling for assistance, but they were replaced by whistles in 1877. Officers above the rank of sergeant made use of horse or carriage, but bicycles for the lower ranks were gradually adopted during the Edwardian period. In one area at least, Bristol lead the way, for photographing criminals was introduced during the 1850's. The Bristol Police force was the first in the country to use this new aid to identification.

Communications and the passing of orders had to be carried out by word of mouth or by message carriers until April 1882. Then the Watch Committee discussed "a letter from the manager of the United Telephone Company offering to connect by private lines the central station, Bridewell Street, with the police stations of Clifton, Bedminster and St. Phillips, with a switchboard placed at the central station to be open day and night at a charge of £63 10s 0d per annum."[26]

At first the Committee feared that confidential messages would be overheard by members of the public. Nevertheless the availability of rapid communications proved to be too attractive, and within the year all Bristol police stations had been connected to the central exchange sited in Mary le Port Street. The Chief Constable reported that the introduction of the telephone system marked an important development in the force, and would improve the effectiveness of the police in combatting crime.

Crime figures for the late Victorian period in Bristol show a decline in the number of reported crimes, which followed the national trend at this time. The number of persons sentenced for indictable offences fell from 707 in 1880 to 182 in 1890, while the numbers appearing before the Magistrates fell from 6,300 in 1882 to 5,521 in 1890.

26. *Watch Committee Minutes*, 12 April 1882.



Members of the Bristol Police engaged in simulated horseback cutlass drill, Bridewell, 1877

The biggest crime rate in Bristol occurred in the south-east area of the city between Bedminster and St. Phillips. The Watch Committee referred to the "densely populated area of St. Phillips"[27] as a district in need of extra police manpower. Crimes of assault, theft (the most common crime being the theft of boots), beer house brawls and domestic fights were common in this 'rookery' area of narrow streets, overcrowded lodging houses, high levels of unemployment and squalid living conditions.[28]

Detective Sergeant Charles Lawrence recalled "In St. Jude's and St. Phillips there were nights when seven different fights were in progress within a distance of 150 yards. Schools for young pick-pockets flourished in Tower Lane . . . Soldiers from Horfield Barracks challenged police to stand up fights and constables could not in safety patrol the Pithay, Silver Street and St. Phillip's Marsh."[29] In Bedminster, policemen and miner-inhabitants engaged in fist fights to settle arguments. Most notorious of all was Gloucester Lane, St. Phillip's, "consisting mainly of public houses and low lodging houses, it had the worst of reputations. In 1870 P.C. Hill was stabbed to death in the street outside the *Three Horse Shoes* Tavern."[30] Many assaults upon police occurred in these areas. The *Western Daily Press* reported numerous instances of violence thus "when P.C. 51C arrived to quell a disturbance, the prisoner assaulted him, threw him down and kicked him"; "P.C. Drew appeared in court with his arm in a sling . . ." "The defendant was intoxicated. He savagely assaulted P.C. 84A, knocking him down and kicking him in the eye. . ."

The attitude of magistrates had changed by the end of the century, the even-handed approach of the 1840's gave way to support for the police. Magistrates imposed prison sentences of between three and six months with hard labour on persons convicted of injuring a policeman. The Bridewell Street Police Court, completed in 1880, witnessed numerous convictions for assault. In the same year a prison van was purchased for the transportation of prisoners, replacing the practice of marching convicts in chains along the public highway.

27. *Watch Committee Reports*, 3 April 1889.
28. "Homes of the Bristol Poor", *Bristol Mercury*, 1884.
29. *Evening Post*, 13 March 1942.
30. Reece Winstone, *Bristol in the 1880's*, 1962, p. 63.

As the rate of serious crime in Bristol apparently fell, the police encouraged by the Watch Committee, attempted to suppress the 'social evils' of gambling, drunkenness, disorderly public houses, prostitution and child labour. The 1874 Licensing Act required police to inspect licensed houses. The Clerk to the Bristol Magistrates, Holmes Gore, giving evidence to the Royal Licensing Commission in June 1896, referred to "a police crusade began in 1882 against alcoholism and disorderly houses in Bristol."[31] The Watch Committee ordered constables to visit licensed premises during beat duty: "If you find drunk or disorderly persons, you should point out to the seller the drunken person and take names and addresses."[32]

Crime figures show a gradual decline in the cases of reported drunkenness. In 1887 police charged 4,277 persons with drunkenness, the number fell each year to 2,292 in 1895. The *Western Daily Press* reported the view that, "improved education and the diminution of drunkenness are the main causes for the falling off in crime."[33]

The police crusade against drunkenness coincided with an upsurge in the work of Temperance Societies in the city from 1880. A new 'force' also began to wage war against alcohol at this time. On 21 August 1880 the Salvation Army opened its first chapel in Bristol in North Street. The campaigns and marches of the Salvation Army caused a serious problem of public order for the Bristol police. The Salvation Army's method of haranguing persons in and around public houses in the poorer areas of Bristol met opposition:– "P.C. 20D stated that the defendant attempted to drive his wagon at the procession of the Salvation Army in Barrow Lane."[34] On four occasion at least in 1884 police had to intervene as Salvation Army members were attacked outside beer houses. One bright constable arrested the Captain of a Salvation Army Band in April 1884 stating that "The crowd some sixty or seventy in number, which had assembled around the band, commenced to take up stones and street filth which they threw at the defendant and his companions . . . P.C. 86A stated that unless he had

31. *Bristol Mercury*, 14 July 1896.
32. *Police Instruction Book*, p. 128.
33. *Western Daily Press*, 25 October 1892.
34. *Western Daily Press*, 28 March 1884.

arrested the Captain to preserve the peace, there would have been a riot."[35] The Magistrates dismissed the case.

The License Book 1897–1900 shows that police Superintendents had the responsibility of inspecting licensed premises, viewing alterations to premises and vetting license applications, the aim being to suppress disorderly houses. In 1883 police secured 44 convictions against publicans, and the number of licensed houses fell from 1350 to 1284. The next year saw 166 police objections to the renewal of licenses. Police raids were carried out on a regular basis to suppress 'illegal gaming' and prostitution.

The use of public houses for the purpose of prostitution seems to have been fairly common in the central and south-east areas of the city in the late Victorian period. Thus, "P.C. 3A with Inspector Maddock visited the Merchants Arms and found three prostitutes drinking in the bar . . . the Inspector informed the licensee he would be reported."[36] Constable Parfitt reported, "I with P.C. Pearce visited the White Hart. We found five prostitutes in the bar . . ."[37] Publicans could lose their license if they allowed their houses to be used for disorderly purposes, or even compelled to appear in court. "P.C. 22D proved that he was outside the Bell Inn, Gloucester Lane, St. Phillips, and saw a sailor enter accompanied by four women of a disorderly character . . . the licensee was charged with allowing his premises to be habitually the resort of disorderly women."[38]

While public houses could be closed by witholding licenses, the suppression of brothels proved to be much more difficult. Watch Committee minutes during the 1880's recorded that letters of complaint had been received identifying sixteen popular brothels in the city. In 1879 the Chief Constable directed constables "to observe proceedings of brothels in St. James for the suppression of same," but police found it difficult to secure convictions. The Watch Committee complained to the Home Secretary in 1879 "We ask that steps may be taken to procure an Act of Parliament for the suppression of brothels. In the meantime the Chief Constable is directed to take such steps as may be in his power."[39]

35. *Western Daily Press*, 15 April 1884.
36. *A Division Complaints Book*, 1895–1899, 15 April 1898.
37. *Notebook of Constable Parfitt*, 1891–1894.
38. *Western Daily Press*, 12 August 1897.
39. *Watch Committee Minutes* 13 August 1879.

Sergeant Davis described in 1877 how he and two constables raided a brothel in Tower Lane:–" . . . In four other bedrooms I found four men and four prostitutes either in bed or undressing for the purpose of going to bed, there was at that time nine prostitutes working in the house." But Davis made no mention of any arrests being made. Harassment rather than arrest was the usual practice until the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, which gave police power to close brothels and arrest the owners. But police activity had to be curtailed since "Police have no power to interfere with men and women talking in the street."[40]

Various bye-laws introduced during the 1880's to suppress street trading, hawking, street-cries, street-gaming and begging were enforced by the Bristol police. They also took action to control child labour in the streets of Bristol following the Cruelty to Children Acts of 1883 and 1884. Constables usually cautioned parents and this proved sufficient to stop the practice, but occasionally parents received fines. Thus, "Frederick and Elize Mathling were charged with sending out their son aged eight to sell matches . . ."[41] Regarding serious youth misbehaviour on the streets, the law made particular demands upon policeman. Constable Parfitt recorded in his notebook of 1894, "I administered three strokes of the birch to a seventeen year old boy." In a letter dated 29 August 1897 the Home Secretary reminded Chief Constable Allbutt that "the rod used by police for birching children under ten, should be lighter than that used for other offenders."

While the policing of the city streets remained the responsibility of the constable on his beat, the police force began to specialise and develop separate branches, perhaps the most important development of the period being the establishment of a detective department in 1880.

Plain clothes officers had been used since 1856 in Bristol, their main purpose being to watch for pick-pockets, but many people held in some suspicion the notion of a permanent undercover corps of policemen.

The Metropolitan detective force, established in 1842, possessed only 15 men in 1868 out of a police force of 8,000. One of these pioneer Metropolitan detectives however, E.W. Coathupe, became Chief Constable of Bristol in 1876. A Home Office

40. *Police Instruction Book*, p. 134.
41. *Western Daily Press*, 17 October 1894.

Commission of 1878 recommended the expansion of the Metropolitan detective force, as a result of which a Metropolitan criminal investigation department was established, comprising a total force of 278 detectives. It had one purpose, to catch criminals, and it proved to be very successful.

Coathupe persuaded the Watch Committee Bristol would be left behind other forces if it continued to ignore this branch of police work.

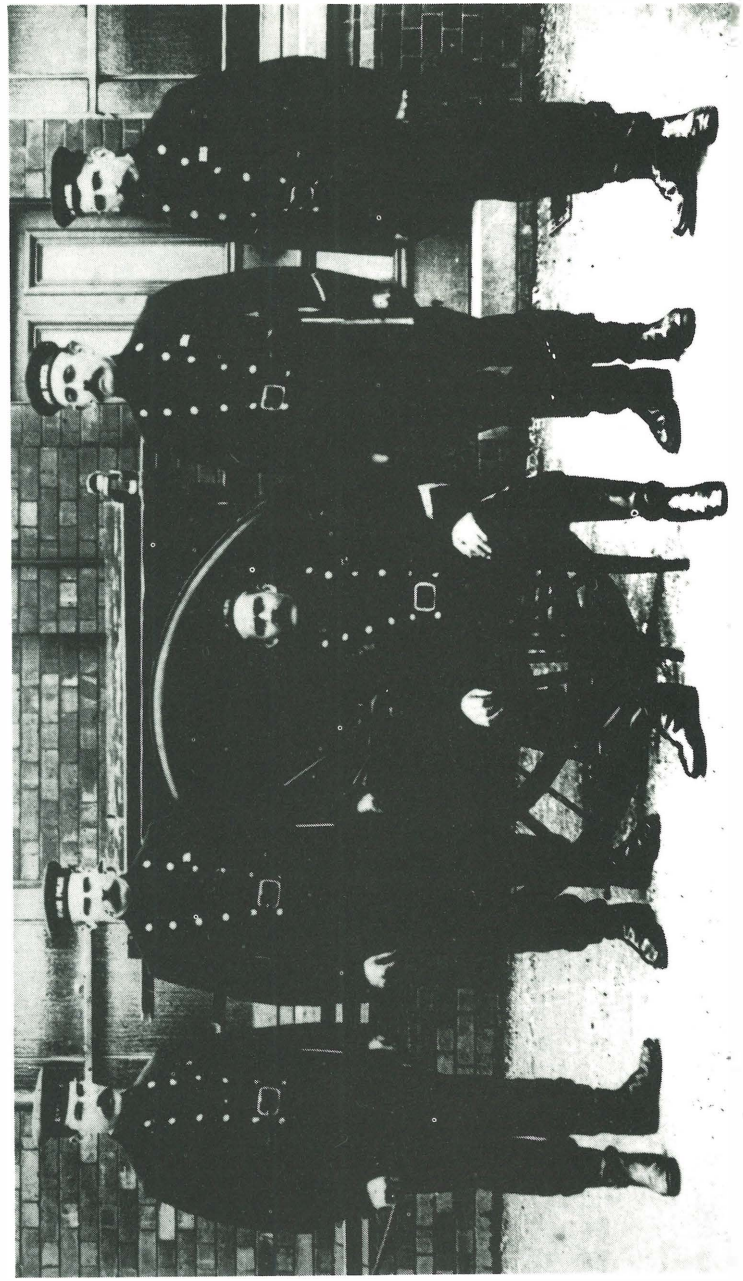
In the *Police Occurrence Book 1880–1881*, among the lists of police on duty are entered for the first time, "Saturday 13 November 1880, Detective Inspector Short. Detectives 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8." Thus a new branch came into existence. No figures are available to examine the success rate of this department in its early years, but there are numerous reports in the local press describing hot-pursuits, murder investigations, cases of forgery, counterfeiting and fraud. In January 1884 detectives arrested a William Donne who was about to make an assassination attempt on the Prince of Wales during his visit to the city.

While some policemen specialised in the skills of detective work, others had to take on the role of firemen. A major problem confronted Bristol Council in 1876, when the Insurance Companies served notice that they were about to discontinue their private fire brigades. The council decided on the grounds of cost to place the responsibility on the police force. The Watch Committee unwillingly accepted the new commitment and decided to use regular constables from the River Section as Bristol's first fire brigade. Its first fire-chief A.R. Tozer rejected the equipment offered by the insurance companies and began a programme of training policemen, while trying to equip his brigade from the meagre resources available. In 1877 Tozer commanded a force of eleven constables, a steam operated fire engine, five hand-operated engines, six hose carts and six fire escapes.

In February 1884 the Watch Committee purchased a "self-propelling, floating, steam fire engine at a cost of £2,500 to be manned by the River Police for the City Docks."[42]

The police fire brigade received considerable criticism for its lack of success. Local newspapers savaged the brigade for its slow reaction to fires, its out of date equipment and poorly trained officers. Indeed there were many problems, no fewer than five

42. *Watch Committee Reports*, March 1885.



Hand-drawn fire engine used by the police

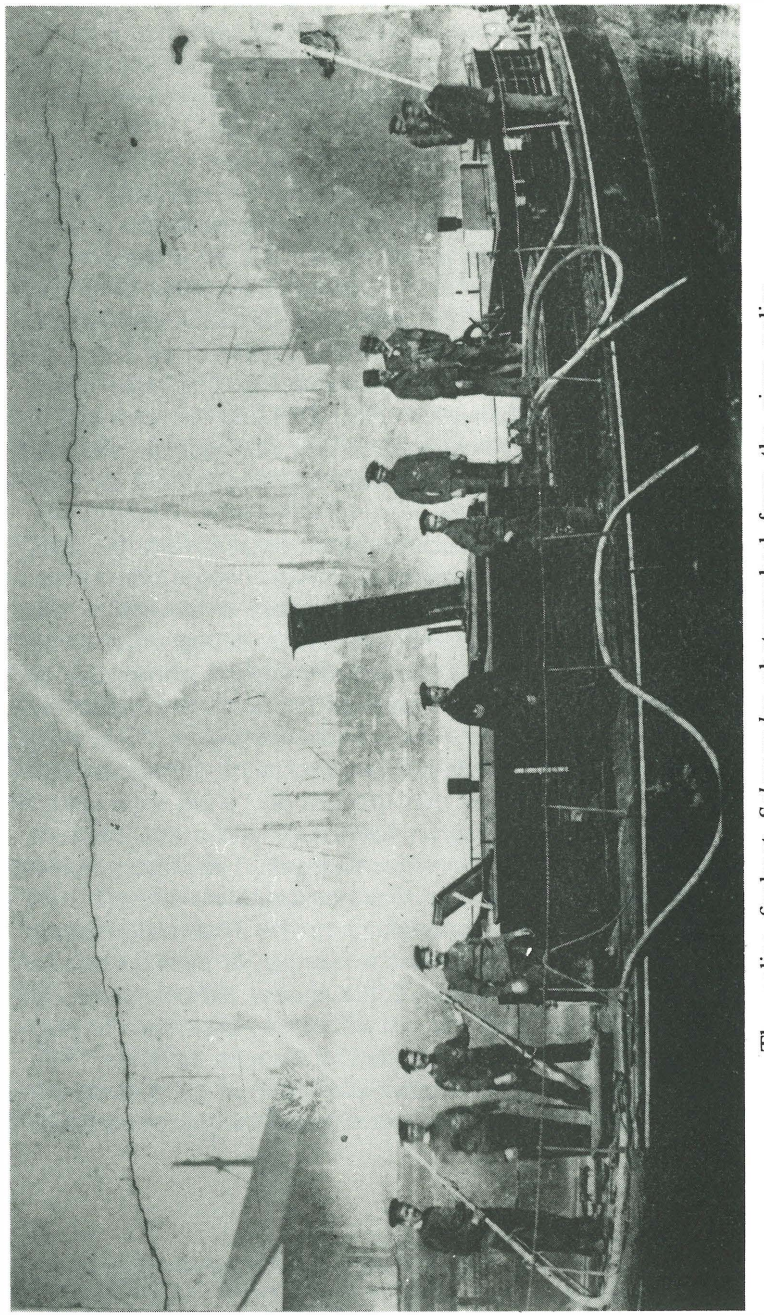
Superintendents came and left between the years 1877–1887, and Chief Constable Henry Allbutt, appointed in 1894, informed the Watch Committee that the city possessed a poor, makeshift brigade, manned by semi-amateurs. His criticism forced the Watch Committee to abandon its scheme to employ River Policemen as firemen, and in 1896 a separate police fire brigade came into being, manned by full-time firemen. It remained in existence until 1941 when it was absorbed into the National Fire Service. The River Police continued to operate the fire float *Salamander*, however, to deal with ship fires.

The protection and policing of Bristol's intricate system of waterways placed a particular responsibility on the Watch Committee. The Port provided the City with a major source of its wealth and employment. Ships moored tightly within the centre of Bristol carried expensive cargoes, while five miles of warehouses, timber-yards, the G.W.R. wharf, Welsh Back, Bathurst Wharf, and Narrow Quays provided ample opportunity for crime. A complex waterways system which interlaced the streets, caused river congestion, the risk of drowning, and the ever present danger of fire. The Watch Committee established a separate River Police Section in 1844. By 1900 the Section comprised 1 Inspector, 4 Sergeants and 24 men. In September 1879 the Committee purchased and fitted out a Brigantine hulk as floating police station at Prince Street Bridge.

The duties of the river policemen included protecting the moored vessels, supervising river traffic, giving help to Customs and Excise men and the Harbourmaster, and when called upon to do so, dragging the river and recovering dead bodies. River Police enforced Plimsoll Line regulations when they came into effect in 1875. The difficult journey from the City docks to Avonmouth caused numerous problems for the river policemen as the wrecks of the S.S. *Demerara*, *Black Eagle* and *Kron Prinz* had demonstrated.

When the Avonmouth and Portishead docks opened in the 1880's, the River Police became increasingly involved at the mouth of the river. Chief Constable Allbutt recognised that to operate efficiently, river police would have to devote their entire time to river duties, and so they were removed from land fire brigade work in 1896.

It was due to pressure from Allbutt, and the move towards greater specialisation within the Bristol police, that the Watch Committee decided to form a mounted section in September 1899.



The police fireboat *Salamander* photographed from the river police station at Prince Street, Bristol

Mounted policemen played a minor role in the Victorian police. Senior officers used horses as a means of transport and for signifying their rank, and Inspectors used them for supervising men on beat duty. Mounted duties for constables consisted mainly of ceremonial tasks and carrying urgent messages.

Allbutt's new branch of the police force consisted of "1 mounted Inspector, and 8 mounted men."[43] It took as its instruction book the *British Army Cavalry Manual*, and used this source for its code of riding practice and horse management. The initial purpose of this "small permanent force . . . mainly for patrol duty and carrying dispatches between the central and outside stations," was to help overcome the policing problems caused by the 1897 boundary extensions. Mounted men were used to poor effect during the labour disturbances of 1889–1893, and the schooling of horses in obedience, crowd control and self-control, and the training of professional mounted police had to wait until the next century.

The labour disputes in which mounted officers were involved caused the force serious problems in the last two decades of the Victorian period. During 1889 the trade union movement was extended to the ranks of unskilled workers. Although Bristol with its diverse smaller industries tended to be less union-conscious than the iron, steel and textile areas of the north, it became the central strongpoint for union activity in the south-west. In 1889 the seamen, gasworkers and coalminers formed unions in the city. The London Dock Strike of that year touched off "a full scale labour revolt in Bristol."[44] Throughout the winter picket-line confrontations occurred between the police and groups of hitherto unorganised workers. In October 1889 the management of the Bristol Cotton Works Company complained to the Watch Committee that, "the police did not protect the company's men during the picketing of the works on Friday 25th October 1889. Sergeant 2D and the constable on duty did not afford any assistance to men wishing to get into the works stopped by the men on strike."[45] In the same month police took a more active part in the gasworkers' strike. Men who wished to work were given transport and police

43. *Watch Committee Minute*, 27 September 1899.
44. Large D. & Whitfield, *The Bristol Trades Council 1873–1973*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, p. 6.
45. *Watch Committee Minutes*, 30 October 1889.

protection. Constable Parfitt recorded in his notebook, ". . . I immediately assisted Inspector Bailey and a number of constables to escort the two breaks into the gasworks, conveying the men who had been surrounded by an excited crowd of people."

In November 1889 the Watch Committee congratulated the Chief Constable "on the excellent arrangements made by the police during the recent Dockers' strike."[46] On this occasion 'free labourers', as the police referred to them, had been given protection while working at Welsh Back. On 5 January 1890 police arrested ten men for 'riotous picketting' during a strike at the Bristol Flour and Bread Company. The following month saw large pickets outside the Bristol Boot and Shoe Company.

Simultaneous strikes by iron workers, tobacco workers and tramway men during the winter, stretched police resources to the extent that the Chief Constable reported, "It has been very difficult to maintain discipline during the present crisis."[47]

The prosperous industrialists who made up the majority of the Watch Committee, were clearly worried. Demands for 'the right to confer' and a pay increase had been growing in the police force itself, as the police strikes of 1872 and 1890 elsewhere in the country had demonstrated. Their fears proved groundless, however. The young ex-agricultural worker from Somerset and Gloucestershire who now wore the blue uniform of the Bristol Constabulary did not have enough sympathy with the Bristol industrial worker to openly rebel and support industrial strike action.

In February 1891 the Watch Committee sent fifty Bristol policemen to Cardiff to assist in maintaining order during the Cardiff docks and tramways strikes. The *Bristol Mercury* reported "Forty seven strikers were committed for trial and nine imprisoned for violent behaviour . . . the satisfactory results in stopping the strike were largely due to the loyalty, fidelity and exemplary conduct of the police force."[48]

The following year witnessed the greatest violence of this troubled period. In October 1892 the Watch Committee gave policemen the responsibility of protecting blackleg 'free labourers'

46. *ibid.*, 6 November 1889.
47. *Bristol Times & Mirror*, 23 January 1890.
48. *Bristol Mercury*, 14 April 1891.

who had been brought into the city to take the place of strikers. The dispute involved members of the Bristol Dockers Union, timber workers and quayside labourers. The employers reacted to the strike by a 'lock-out'. On 23 November 1892, 120 constables assembled at Temple Meads Station to protect imported blacklegs from a crowd of 800 dockers. Windows were smashed and "Superintendent Cann ordererd the police to draw their staves and charge the crowd"[49] in order to clear a path. The arrival of these blacklegs exacerbated the dispute. Dock employers billeted them in timber yards and continual police protection was essential. If they ventured out after work they were stoned, parties of strikers also raided the docks and stoned them while at work. During December 1892 tension rose, "hostility was shown towards the police . . . there had been constant assaults."[50] These events attracted the attention of a national figure, Ben Tillett, General Secretary of the Dockers Union. Tillett came to Bristol, his birthplace, with the purpose of organising a mass demonstration in the centre of Bristol. With the Bristol Strike Committee he planned a march for the 23 December 1892 "to raise money for the starving families of the strikers."[50]

On 12 December 1892 an alarmed Mayor wrote to the Home Secretary asking for military assistance. Of the total Bristol force of 393 men, only 324 were available owing to 69 being sick or absent, and of the 324, 80 men had been detailed to guard the blacklegs living and working at the city docks. The *Bristol Mercury* reported "the Magistrates have chosen to regard it as a great upheaval of the working classes of the city."[51]

On 22 December two squadrons of troops comprising 200 Dragoons and Hussar Lancers entered the city from Aldershot. Chief Constable Coathupe informed the Strike Committee that a prescribed route had to be followed by the marchers, "Neither torches nor lanterns must be carried in procession."[52] But the reply he received did little to calm matters and he reported "The marchers will only give way when a stronger force than our own is pitted against us."[52] The *Western Daily Press* reported that "Bristol was in a state of the greatest commotion, disorder and alarm,"[52] when the march began on the night of the 23 December

49. *Western Daily Press*, 15 April 1893.
50. *ibid.*, 15 April 1893.
51. *Bristol Mercury*, 24 December 1892.
52. *Western Daily Press*, 15 April 1893: Police evidence at the trial of Ben Tillett.

1892. The Chief Constable informed his Superintendents in a memorandum of 21 December 1892 that "should a procession, crowd or mob perambulating the streets break into a run or make rushes to terrorise the citizens, the police must disperse it and if necessary arrest the principals."

Estimates of the size of the crowd vary between 28,000 and 35,000. Of this number approximately 5,000 took part in the march and 30,000 assembled at the Horsefair. The crowd included not only dockers and quayside labourers, but also a group of women, 'Sanders white Slavers', on strike from a sweet factory, and many sympathisers from other trades.

Before the demonstrators assembled "there were excited crowds of dockers in the neighbourhood of the timber yard, armed with sticks."[53] The City Magistrate commented on the "disturbed state of feeling in this city."[54]

Over 5,000 people were assembled at Tower Hill and a portion of the crowd made a feint to follow the route planned by the police, but the majority went in the direction of Bristol Bridge. "A scene of great disorder occurred. The crowd greatly outnumbered the police and a portion of the people made their way through the ranks to the Horsefair. Constables were knocked down, stones thrown and the soldiers had to be called."[55] Superintendent Cann reported that "He was on Bristol Bridge when a disorganised mob numbering some 5,000 came up Welsh Back and stormed through a police line." Cann and several constables were knocked over.[56]

Inspector Tanner placed his command of ten mounted constables across Prince Street, "but the crowd surged round throwing stones."[56] He later described the crowd as 'riotous', his command of temporarily mounted officers having neither the necessary training nor experience to deal with the crowd.

Police attempts to keep the march to a preplanned route met with resistance. "The crowd attempted to break through the cordons of police at several street corners."[57] Detective Rawle later gave evidence that several of the marchers had dressed as police officers and marched at the head of the procession as if to

53. *ibid.*, 15 April 1893.
54. *ibid.*, 27 January 1893.
55. *ibid.*, 15 April 1893.
56. *ibid.*, 28 January 1893.
57. *ibid.*, 27 January 1893.

escort them. This apparently served to confuse many of the constables on duty.

The procession made its way into Bridge Street and through Wine Street to the Horsefair. Sergeant London complained that "he was assaulted several times and thrown down . . . the crowd was disorderly and riotous."[58] Several members of the crowd threw stones and smashed windows in Lower Castle Street and Merchant Street, as the procession made its way to the meeting point. "At the Horsefair there was 25,000 or 30,000 people, the scene was of the greatest disorder . . . the police drew their batons but were powerless to disperse the mob . . . police were drawn up on the outside of the crowd. The military arrived at 10.30 p.m. They used their lances to disperse the crowd . . . stones were thrown at the military and sticks used."[59] At the head of the cavalry rode Charles Wills, City Magistrate. He attempted to read the Riot Act, stick in hand, to the crowd which had assembled to listen to speeches from strike leaders.

One of these principals, John Williams, recalled many years later, "I was in the Horsefair when the Riot Act was read. We did not disperse and down came the soldiers. They rode right through us scattering us all over the place. Several of us managed to get Tillett away by means of an alley. Many people were injured in that clash."[60]

The crowd described by Detective Inspector Short as "the worst crowd I have seen in Bristol in 45 years"[61] finally broke up at midnight on 23 December 1892. The Chief Constable reported to the Watch Committee that 51 constables had been injured during the skirmishes and many civilians needed hospital attention. The local press recorded "There were ugly rushes and many broken heads."[62]

The cavalry had twice charged the crowd with orders to disperse it. Police arrested four strike leaders and several marchers. They were later sentenced to three months imprisonment. The police considered that one man in particular had been responsible for causing the riot. Plainclothes officers present at a speech made by Ben Tillett on 18 December 1892 testified that he said, "If it comes

58. *ibid.*, 27 January 1893.
59. *ibid.*, 15 April 1893.
60. *Bristol Evening Post*, 23 December 1939.
61. *Western Daily Press*, 28 January 1893.
62. *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 24 December 1892.

to fighting, we will fight too with our fists or with clubs, and if it comes to guns we can pick them up also." Police arrested Tillett on a charge of incitement to riot. The jury at his Old Bailey trial in the following April found him not guilty.

The City Magistrate defended his decision to call in troops: "The crowd may have been irritated by the sight of the military, but the Mayor of this city was put on trial for not calling out the military during the Bristol Riots of 1831 . . . the police and town would not have been safe if the military had not been there."[63] Local press observers wrote scathingly however, "There seems to have been plenty of Justices in readiness with a Riot Act burning their pockets and feeling themselves Major Generals at the very least."[64] Of the summoning of the cavalry, the *Mercury* judged "There was nothing more than the police would have been able to deal with . . . It was a panic-stricken and needless appeal to military force."[64]

The Bristol Strike Committee complained to the Watch Committee "The actions of the police and soldiery were most unwarrantable and brutal, and as such should be met by the resentment of the whole of the citizens."[65] The events of 'Black Friday', as it became known, passed into folklore, and were long remembered in Bristol as an echo of 1793 and 1831.

The violence carried on into 1893. The dock strike continued with great hardship and bitterness. On May 3 1893 the river police escorted a ship up the River Avon which carried a group of 'free labourers' who came ashore at the Cumberland Basin. Constable Parfitt recorded in his notebook, "A large crowd of dockers and others followed them, the crowd numbering about 2000 were hooting and yelling . . . with five detectives and other officers and constables we crossed the river." Police became involved in running skirmishes with strikers. Parfitt described how "stones were thrown freely and several of the police were struck. We charged to free ourselves and succeeded in driving them back. .by 9 pm we had succeeded in dispersing the gangs." Peace returned in June 1893.

Watch Committee members showed their gratitude: "In consideration of the great amount of additional work involving very

63. *Western Daily Press*, 28 January 1893.
64. *Bristol Mercury*, 24 December 1892.
65. *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 24 December 1892.

long hours of duty thrown upon the whole of the police in consequence of the disturbances arising from the labour troubles from 10 November 1892 to 15 June 1893 three days extra pay and one day additional leave to be granted to every member."[66] The Watch Committee rewarded Superintendent Cann, who had played a significant part during the labour disturbances, with a salary increase of £30 per annum. The Committee later appointed him chief constable.

The remaining years of the Victorian period were comparatively peaceful but policemen had encountered a new problem, a new role and consequently a changing identity. The Chief Constable defined the impartial role of policemen during labour disputes: "The police must treat with impartiality those who seek work and those who refuse it, and must give protection to all persons against violence, intimidation and other forms of coercion."[67]

While policemen came to terms with these issues in the late Victorian period, they also had to carry out numerous, if less exciting functions, which might be described as 'non police' work, and which today would be carried out by other services. Vagrants, destitute and unmarried mothers, alcoholics, mentally ill, children sent out to beg or sell matches and other unfortunates at the lower end of society in Bristol were dealt with by policemen.

The inhabitants of Bedminster received assistance from the police during the floods of October 1882 and March 1889 when the River Frome burst its banks: "The water police with their boats did good service in taking provisions to flood-bound people . . . police called from house to house in the poorest districts and delivered supplies."[68] The ambulance service was pioneered by policemen in Bristol, many of whom took part in the new 'First Aid' courses being offered by St. John Ambulance Brigade. There are numerous reports of police taking on the role of ambulance-men. Not only did the constable have to deal with the growing problem of road traffic congestion, tramcars and young men and women 'riding furiously' on velocopedes and bicycles, he had to push injured persons to hospital on one of the two-wheeled stretchers introduced by the Watch Committee in 1877.

Whether it was a climber trapped on the Avon Gorge ("P.C.

66. *Watch Committee Minutes*, 18 October 1893.
67. *Police Instruction Book*, 1894.
68. *Bristol Observer*, 16 March 1889.

83B took a rope down to the man who had gone over St. Vincent's rocks. Twenty persons assisted in hauling them up to the Downs")[69] or a drowning person in the floating harbour ("P.C. Greenslade and P.C. Keil effected the gallant rescue of Ellen Burns. P.C. Greenslade has on several occasions rescued persons who have fallen in. . .")[70] the policeman had to be prepared to take on any role.

Public health and safety now fell to the police. Following legislation in 1878 policemen acted as Inspectors of Food and Drugs. Adulterated milk was a particular target. The Watch Committee appointed one Inspector in February 1878 but the workload proved too much and in June 1881 the Committee appointed a further 8 Inspectors. By 1883 17 police Inspectors were engaged in taking samples for the public analyst's inspection.

In 1881 the Watch Committee appointed 8 Inspectors "to carry into effect the execution of the Explosives Act of 1875"[80] and with the onset of the motor car, the storage of petroleum. During the 1880's four Inspectors were responsible for enforcing weights and measures regulations, and Inspector Dent was appointed as an officer of the Port Sanitary Authority. Similarly the Shop Hours Act of 1892 required Inspectors to supervise the hours worked by young people.

As a result of such multifarious activities, and the growth of the size of the force, the internal administration became more complex. Clerical work developed as a particular field. The various inspection and licensing responsibilities required an ever-increasing amount of paper work and resulted in the employment, in the 1880's, of a small team of civilians whose presence was intended to release policemen for street duties.

The Victorian policeman's lot was 'not a happy one', or so the song affirms. Certainly Victorian society made great demands upon its police force. By the end of the century the role of the policeman had changed. In the early years Joseph Bishop presided over a force whose raison d'être had been to keep the peace and apprehend criminals. At the turn of the century policemen took on a much wider responsibility, to serve the community in a broader sense. If it was not a happy lot, it could be a varied one.

69. *Western Daily Press*, 9 June 1885.
70. *Western Daily Press*, 15 April 1882.
71. *Watch Committee Minutes*, 1 June 1881.

APPENDIX

Population of Bristol 1841–1901

City of Bristol		*Suburbs* (approx)	
1841	125,146	1841	15,000
1851	137,328	1861	23,000
1861	154,093	1881	55,000
1871	182,552	1891	85,000
1881	206,503	1901	18,000 (after boundary
1901	329,086		extension)

Rateable Value of Fixed Property Within Municipal Boundary

1841	£406,206	1841	£906,861
1851	£437,726	1891	£1,029,256
1861	£508,988	1901	£1,561,891
1871	£719,983		

Growth of Numbers in the Bristol Police

Year	*Strength of Men*	*Population of City*
1836	228	120,000
1845	252	129,730
1857	303	147,246
1872	357	185,367
1897	402	232,040
1898	488	320,911
1906	549	363,233

Proportion of Police per head of Population

1836	1 : 526
1845	1 : 514
1857	1 : 485
1872	1 : 519
1891	1 : 560
1897	1 : 560
1898	1 : 657

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The records of the Bristol Constabulary are in the custody of the Bristol Record Office, The Council House, College Green. A full list is available from Mr John Williams, City Archivist. For the late Victorian period they include the *Watch Committee Minutes*, which record the proceedings of the governing body of the Bristol police; *Watch Committee Reports* 1860–1901, made for the City Council; *Register of Constables 1836– 1905*, which gives the name, height, date of joining, previous employment, date and reason for leaving for all constables; the Register of Conduct 1872–1906, giving promotions, commendations and disciplinary action; *Registers of Divisions A–D*, which give details of personnel; together with various miscellaneous police documents, notebooks, beat cards, inventories, and public notices. Several Criminal Record books and Crime Occurrence books are also available for reference.

The collection includes a number of interesting police newspapers of the time, *The Police Gazette, Illustrated Police News, Police Guardian, Police Review and Parade Gossip*.

The Bristol Central Public Library has copies of various local newspapers, *The Western Daily Press, The Bristol Times and Mirror, The Bristol Mercury*, and *The Bristol Observer* which may be consulted.

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