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# *Quicklook at* **Police**



## About Quicklook at Police

**O**FTEN taken for granted and sometimes criticised, the “thin blue line” has always faced great challenges and pressure to adapt to a fast changing world. Society depends on the police to protect people, property and our way of life.

This book covers all main aspects of police work. We see how the police service developed, how political and social trends have influenced it and its relationships with the public. It is no longer realistic – if it ever was – to think of “the public” as one group.

We examine the enormous range of tasks that the police are asked to undertake, including crime prevention, detection and the prosecution process. There is responsibility for the protection of individuals, sometimes at vast events, or demonstrations – even riots. Emergencies, such as natural disasters, require police action. Apparently routine activities, such as traffic policing, pose their own problems.

The different roles of uniformed and plain clothes officers are explained and the relationship between them is examined. There are many specialists in the police. We find out what they do.

The police have for many years been early adopters of technology. This continues to transform the way in which policing operates – we find out how.

Police forces in the UK range from the huge Metropolitan Police Service to much smaller county forces. We see how they are structured, what the different ranks are and what officers at different levels do. The recruitment, promotion and training procedures are explained. There are many opportunities for careers in the service – many of them for civilians.

We get inside the system and see how police stations function over a typical day.



Quicklook at

# *Police*

Ian James



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books

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# *Why do we need the police?*



**P**EOPLE are not perfect. They have their own opinions, aspirations and qualities. They can be selfish, or worse. If they are grouped together in large populations, their conflicting wishes and actions can soon lead to friction, or conflict. Laws are needed to try to prevent this. All societies have them. They vary a great deal but have certain things in common. One of these is that, without a system of enforcement, laws are useless.

Certain types of conduct challenge the smooth operation of society so much that they are illegal everywhere. Murder, rape and other forms of unjustified assault come into this category. No society can in practice allow people to simply take whatever they want whenever they feel like it. As a result, theft is always a crime.

As the modern world has developed and populations have increased, more and more laws have been introduced to regulate what is regarded as unacceptable behaviour. These laws are useless if there is no way of finding out who has been breaking them and then dealing with them effectively.

Societies, including modern ones, are unattractive places when systems of law enforcement break down. The collapse of a government, as a result of invasion or revolution all too often leads to a period of looting and destruction. All of the things normally taken for granted, such as food, water and power supplies, can break down very quickly. Prompt and sometimes very brutal action is normally taken to restore order. In the meantime people take the law into their own hands – perhaps by forming vigilante groups in an effort to defend people, homes and property.

## **Life before the police**

Laws, detection and punishment pre date the development of police. In the case of the UK, government and administration once depended on a hierar-

chy of powerful individuals. Starting with the monarch at the top, effective power was handed down to noblemen, who were normally major landowners with extensive powers of control over the people who lived in their areas. They, in turn, often relied on more junior, but still powerful, individuals to ensure that their interests were protected.

This feudal system combined supervision of local administration with the ability and obligation to raise troops in time of war or unrest. These were frequent occurrences and as a result the wishes of the local Lord or Duke could be enforced by armed soldiers and others, if required. There was certainly no power vacuum.

One of the more creditable aspects of the development of British society is that, for many hundreds of years, there has been a system of courts. These deal with issues of guilt or innocence as well as a wide range of “civil” disputes – which are cases which normally do not involve crimes at all. Many of the features of modern legal systems taken for granted today developed in England and Wales over hundreds of years. The system that emerged – the “Common Law”, has stood the test of time and has been adopted by many countries around the world, such as the USA.

Features of the Common Law include independent judges, the presumption that the accused is innocent, until found guilty, legal representation for the accused and for serious offences, jury trials. A jury consists of a number of members of the general public. Their job is to decide whether the accused person is guilty or not. This is not done by the judge.

For centuries the Common Law operated in a rather rough and ready fashion. It was far from perfect – and is not perfect now. It did however achieve some very important things. Everyone, even the sovereign, was subject to the law. No one could do whatever they wanted. Certainly not the police, or the predecessors of the police.

Before the development of a professional police force, reliance was placed on private citizens, sometimes supervised by a local “Magistrate”: an unpaid person with some judicial powers. Even today, private individuals have the power to arrest offenders. The elements of modern policing were in place. The police are drawn from the general population and have powers derived from those that everyone enjoys. These have, over time, been extended and almost all arrests are now done by the police, but the fact that they are

“citizens in uniform” can still be important. They are certainly themselves very much subject to the law and their actions can be and regularly are challenged in the courts.

The legal safeguards that we take for granted do not exist everywhere. They are largely absent in a so – called “Police State”, where police have few restrictions on what they do. In extreme examples of such societies, individuals can disappear in the middle of the night, never to be seen again. Dictatorships can use police to maintain a rule by fear and to remove people that they find inconvenient.

Policing, and the way in which it operates, has a huge influence on a society.



# *The development of the police*



## **Role of the police**

**T**HE task of the police is to enforce the law by taking steps to minimise crime and detect it and catch offenders when it occurs.

As society has developed, so has policing. This book concentrates on England and Wales, but many of the points which arise are of general application.

## **Sheriffs and Constables**

Britain has for centuries been divided into administrative areas for local government purposes, called counties, or “shires”. In Saxon times, over 1,000 years ago, the “Shire reeve” was an important local official, responsible for “keeping the peace”, by a combination of acting as a Magistrate (in other words, a judge dealing with criminal cases) and supervising the arrest and processing of offenders. To this day Magistrates hold the title “Justice of the Peace”.

Changes came about after the Norman Conquest but the names and roles of the “Shire reeve”, or Sheriff, and Magistrates proved to be surprisingly enduring. Aspects of the old way of doing things persisted into the early 19th Century. Counties still have Sheriffs, but their roles are now largely ceremonial.

Sheriffs appointed one or sometimes more “constables”. Their task was to arrest offenders for a wide range of offences, many related to poaching, theft, and robbery. These, usually unpaid, constables were drawn from their local communities.

The Industrial Revolution led to the rapid expansion of many towns and cities. The old way of policing, via unpaid part time constables, proved inadequate. Policing came increasingly under the control of police authori-

ties run by the rapidly expanding local councils. As the 19th Century progressed, this led to the creation of a large number of local police forces. They were funded by both local and central government.

### **Robert Peel /Bow Street runners**

The London Police Service was established in the 19th century primarily to counter the rise in crime after the Napoleonic wars. After the defeat of Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo in 1815 the army was reduced in size. Many soldiers returned home with little chance of employment. In addition many of those soldiers returned with injuries which made them unemployable. There were a lot of social problems, including plenty of crime.

Sir Robert Peel, who was Home Secretary in 1822, introduced the police constable to the streets of London in 1829. These officers were known as “Peelers” or “Bobbies” after their founder. They wore a long dark blue coat and a tall hat and this uniform made them stand out. The Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 set up the first organised police force for London, with 17 divisions, each with four inspectors and 144 constables. The force was controlled from Scotland Yard, and answerable to the Home Secretary.

In 1829 Sir Richard Mayne, the first Commissioner of the Metropolitan police, wrote:

*“The primary object of an efficient police is the prevention of crime: the next that of detection and punishment of offenders if crime is committed. To these ends all the efforts of police must be directed. The protection of life and property, the preservation of public tranquillity, and the absence of crime, will alone prove whether those efforts have been successful and whether the objects for which the police have been appointed have been attained.”*

London was developing fast in the 19th Century and most of the population was living crammed into poor housing. This gave rise to all sorts of tensions and social problems. The newly emerging police forces certainly had plenty to do. Parliament lost no time in giving them powers to tackle crime. The view seems to have been that in those rough times, these needed to have wide scope.

Many of the laws introduced by Parliament in the 19th Century were still being enforced in the 1980's, especially in London. The Vagrancy Act of 1824

## *About the author*

**I**AN JAMES served with the Metropolitan Police for 30 years. He worked in several specialist departments during his career, serving with the Traffic Division, the Special Patrol Group and the Territorial Support Group in South London. Other postings included Hornsey, Streatham and Epsom police divisions.

Later he was a senior manager at the Central Command Complex, managing the 999 call handling department at New Scotland Yard. At the end of his career he was part of a police team that designed and developed a national 999 call handling computer application for the UK Police Service.

During his service he attended Exeter University and obtained a Masters Degree in Police Studies.

On retirement Ian started a consultancy company. He works closely with the Emergency Services and the Ministry of Defence, designing control rooms. He writes business cases for leading security companies in the UK, and works with suppliers in the emergency control room market.

Ian has represented the Metropolitan Police Motor Club Internationally, rallying a BMW 2002 and a BMW M3. He finished both the London to Mexico Rally and the London to Sydney Rally.

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## Quicklook at **Police**

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The different roles of uniformed and plain clothes officers are explained. We find out what the many specialists do, see how police forces are structured and what officers at different levels do. There are many career opportunities – often for civilians.

● We see how a police station functions on a typical day.

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## About the author

### **Ian James**

served with the Metropolitan Police for 30 years, rising to the rank of Chief Inspector. He worked in a number of specialist departments and became a senior manager in the Central Command Complex, managing the 999 call handling department at New Scotland Yard.



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