Surrey Constabulary History
'An in depth history of policing in Surrey'

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To begin, at the beginning..."[1] Not quite as there has been policing Surrey for a very long time before the Surrey Constabulary was formed following the dreadful murder in his bed, of the Reverend Hollest at Frimley in September 1850. There were also micro-police forces from the 1830s in Farnham, Godalming, Guildford and Dorking, supported by the officers from Union Hall at Southwark from 1792 and of course the Bow Street Runners from 1742. Across the county served the parish constable usually in post for a year, answerable to the magistrates who dominated the system and in fact ruled rural England. The Metropolitan Police formed in 1829 extended the Metropolitan Police District to include Epsom in 1839 and so denied the area to the Surrey Constabulary until this millennium. Surrey Police now have responsibility for the whole of Surrey.

1850 October 18: An editorial in the Liverpool Mercury headed "Crime in Southern England" describes the reality of Surrey clearly. It never has been roses around the door of the country cottages. **"**In the county of Surrey, the house of a clergymen is entered in the night by a party of masked burglars and the reverend gentlemen himself is shot to death in his bedroom. Everyone asks what there is to prevent it and everybody answers "Nothing". If there be any part of the country in which life and property might be supposed to be tolerably safe, it is the county of Surrey. Surrey is a very civilised county. It is a county not of mud huts but of substantial mansions, elegant villas and fine park-like grounds. It is very genteel-nay, a very fashionable county. It is full of well-to-do people. It is convenient – so accessible that the bankers and merchants of the city pitch their tents in the county of Surrey, and yet seem to be only at their counting house doors.

"There is a great deal of wealth in Surrey. There are probably more men of condition in it, more men of a certain worldly standing, men who revel in purple and fine linen, in chariots and in horses, and fare sumptuously every day than in any county in Great Britain. Yet somehow or other, strange as it may appear, these wealthy and enlightened Surrey gentlemen seem, in all that relates to the protection of life and property to be living in a state of primitive barbarism. It required the murder of a country clergyman to reveal the astounding fact to the world. It is not the state of the police is bad – it is that there is no police at all. There is a (parish) constable perhaps, in every parish; and when you have named this important functionary you have named all that there is to protect the lives and property of the inhabitants from murder and robbery in the night.

"Of course in all such cases the cry is for an active police. People evoke the aid of an efficient protective force, as though a well organised, well equipped constabulary army were a thing to be had by asking for it. If they had to nothing else for it there would be no difficulty in the way. But they unfortunately have to ***pay*** for it and that they do not like at all. Protective forces are very expensive things. There is nothing more costly indeed, than the elaborate machinery, which we are compelled perpetually to keep at work for the detection and punishment of crime. The country is ground down by taxation that thieves may be caught and

[1] Dylan Thomas, Under Milk Wood

felons supported. Nothing costs us so much as crime. Everyone is willing to acknowledge this in word; but from few does it receive practical recognition."

1850 October 25: About one month after the murder the outcry led to speedy action. One of the magisterial class had been murdered and enough was enough. The Rural Police Committee meeting was arranged shortly after the murder when it was accepted that in Frimley, a village at the extremity of the western division of the county, is without the protection of a constable. [2]

The Rural Police Committee met at Reigate taking evidence from Superintendent Biddlecombe the head of the Godalming Borough Police (strength of three) and the Chief Constable of Hampshire. Biddlecombe covered an area of 28,940 acres with a population of 10,126 with only one felony in his district over the last twelve months, stealing faggots to the value of sixpence. However he had been sent for to deal with twelve burglaries in surrounding districts in the last six months. There had been no cases of felony in Godalming itself during the last five years.[3] (More about Biddlecombe in a future journal – a remarkable policeman)

The Times reported that fifty Magistrates met to decide if at last Surrey was to have a police force to cover the whole of the county outside the Metropolitan Police District. It was decided that the rural part of the county were to have three divisions, Chertsey, Dorking and Godalming and the chief constable is to reside at Dorking, the most central point. It was proposed that the various lock-up premises be repaired and that station houses etc. be erected, the estimated cost of which would not exceed £3,000, which could be raised upon the security of the police rate and paid with interest in twenty-year instalments. The chief constable's salary £300pa plus £110 for horse and travelling expenses etc.; a chief superintendent £170, five superintendents £450; eight inspectors £486.12s; seventy constables £3463.4s; allowances for clothing etc., £1227.11s £6284.7s annual total to be levelled on the divisions as a rate of three pennies in the pound.

There were to be significant savings by using the police to undertake other functions including the conveyance of prisoners, £240. The salaries of several Inspectors of Weights and Measures can be avoided as duties can be performed by the rural police, £380; superintendents of lock-up houses, £80. Payments to constables at Coroner's inquests: £74. Parish, Special and private constables at least £1800 making £2,574. Balance £3710.7s, which will be much reduced after the force has been in operation for a short time. "— that the expense of maintaining them will be, it is believed, be little felt by the rural portion of the county, while the committee are convinced that the security afforded to it's life and property will amply repay the expenditure incurred, and that their recommendations when carried into effect will prove of the utmost advantage to all classes of the community" On the motion of Lord Lovaine the report was adopted and the election of the chief constable was appointed to take place on the first day of the Epiphany Sessions.

Quarter Sessions was where the magistrates for the county met and undertook all the administrative functions required for organising life in the county. The magistrates often in some numbers, not a judge, sat on the bench. At the Surrey Quarter Sessions on 1 January 1851 the rural police committee submitted their report relative to the appointment of a chief constable and the headquarters of the force. Captain Hastings H.E.I.C.S., aged 38 was recommended as a fit person for the duty; and after some discussion amongst the magistrates the adoption of the report was carried by a majority of two, the numbers being 20 and 18. Captain Hastings was accordingly elected.[4] Now that was a close call for someone who was to stay in command of the Surrey Constabulary until 1899.

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[2] 1850 October 18 Liverpool Mercury
[3] Durrant page 4
[4] 1851 January 1: Morning Post Wednesday

The Constabulary became operational with an establishment of seventy police officers, including five superintendents. The chief constable required the men to be honest and sober, less than thirty years of age and at least five feet seven inches tall. There was no minimum age - one constable was appointed at the age of fourteen and another at fifteen. It maybe that these young men were to be used as clerks or runners, it is difficult to imagine they would be given the onerous responsibilities of a constable. The first Police Cadets? The first county headquarters was in the old Guildford Borough Police Station at the Corn Market House but this was only until the new headquarters was completed in Woodbridge Road in 1854 where many retired members will have worked. (Including me!) County police stations were established in Bagshot, Chertsey, Dorking and Farnham and new stations were built at Egham, Godstone, Guildford, Haslemere, Hersham, Leatherhead, and Reigate. The original station at Chertsey was sold because of its poor condition and a new one built. The five superintendents were stationed at Reigate, Dorking, Godalming, Farnham and Headquarters which seems to leave something of a gap in the north of the county which was soon filled at Chertsey. Woking was a part of the Chertsey Division where a lock up was built. As each constable had to patrol about nine and a half square miles, horses were required. The Guildford Borough Police numbered just three constables and a superintendent and were incorporated within the county – for a few years.[5]

There was no rank of sergeant, which does not appear in the records until 1865. There were four classes of constables with newly appointed officers starting at class four and moving through the classes on promotion. They were required to work seven days a week and granted twelve days leave a year, which had to be taken in summer as no leave was permitted during the winter. It was not until 1853 that an Instruction Book was provided to give guidance on policing matters, although the system of General Orders began on 30 January 1851. The first order related to the taking of leave.

There was no shortage of recruits although as always, the pay was poor, seventeen shillings a week, and the conditions harsh. Of the first seventy men appointed only five served long enough to receive a pension; 29 were dismissed before they served a year and a large number of the others were dismissed or resigned over a short time. There was no shortage of recruits although as always, the pay was poor, seventeen shillings a week, and the conditions harsh. The loss rate was very high and it has to be presumed that the recruit profile was not good. They went for the agricultural labourer as the mainstay as they were seen to be tough, stolid reliable men. Existing police officers transferred in, perpetual parish constables were offered a job and some of the recruits were from the army and navy, notorious for their drinking! However as is evident from the discipline records most liked their drink. Remember this is a time when beer was drunk as quality drinking water was not always available and tea and coffee were expensive. Every workingman drank alcohol in quart pots!

The first uniform style was that of the Metropolitan Police until in 1867 when a new local style was adopted initially with the top hat but in 1864 they changed to the helmet. The men carried a rattle just like the old-fashioned football supporter until the 1880s when the whistle was issued. It is unclear if Surrey Constabulary officers ever carried firearms but those that came before certainly did. They were issued with cutlasses when required such as during the Guildford Guy riots of the 1860s or if they wished, on lonely rural patrols.

There was no formal training and much must have been down to the experience of the superintendents and inspectors who would ensure there was some form of instruction and briefing as to the role and activity of policing. Recruits were allocated a number, which was displayed on their collars and later in the centre of their helmet plates. These not surprisingly became known as collar numbers and were reissued once an officer retired. The key people were to be the divisional superintendents upon which much of the organisation of the force

[5] http://st-caths-web.co.uk/?p=11643

and setting policies and practices would devolve. The chief constable was a soldier with no policing experience so to him people like Biddlecombe, Surrey's first and experienced detective, would have been invaluable.

The new superintendents were: **William Henry Biddlecombe** – Head Constable Godalming number 1, 36, 5ft 10 from the Isle of Wight and had served in the Hants Constabulary. Appointed superintendent and sometimes referred to as chief superintendent, and engaged 1 January 1851 serving until 1 May 1858 when he resigned to take the Swan Inn at Chertsey.
Superintendent Edward Codd joined on 2 January 1851 aged 36, 6 foot, and had been a surgeon. Was an inspector in Staffordshire Police and had served in the Indian Police and in Nottinghamshire. Resigned October 1853 on appointment as Superintendent Plymouth.
Timothy Casey 36 joined 9 January 1851, 5 feet 10ins, previously served in the Metropolitan Police and Staffordshire. Compelled to resign 18 Dec 1852, reason unknown
Alfred Benjamin Hughes also joined on the 9 January 1851 aged 35, 5ft 8ins with previous service in the Metropolitan Police and Alnwick. He resigned on the 16 Nov 1851 to become chief of police in Bath
Philip Sergeant joined on the 9 January 1851 aged 29, 5ft 10ins with previous service in Essex and Bath. He was ordered to resign on the 26 July 1851 owing to debt. However this did not interrupt his career for too long as he was appointed superintendent in Buckinghamshire and later in Lincoln.

Inspectors were appointed and stationed at Guildford and Godalming:
Thomas Bedwell a solicitor from the Carmarthenshire Constabulary as Inspector and later superintendent at Godstone, Dorking and Godalming; permitted to resign 8 Jan 1852 (All those moves in a year!)
Charles Everitt joined in 1851 and a year later in Jan 1852 was appointed superintendent at Farnham being dismissed in October 1856 but later becoming head constable at Godalming and finally head constable Chichester.
Inspector Donaldson from the Dorking police became an Inspector and was stationed at Chobham. Only a month later he went to Leatherhead then the family moved on 21 January 1853 to Horley and on 20 November 1854 to Haslemere where he was killed on 29 July 1855 while dealing with a serious disturbance in the town centre.

The following paragraphs will give some sense of the way the force operated. There was more work than we might imagine with drink and poverty at the route of much of the crime. There were murders, sex crime, deserters, vagrancy, and the whole gamut of criminal activity. The population was expanding considerably. In 180 there were about 9 million people in England and by the time of the Surrey Constabulary in 1851 this has doubled to 18 million bringing huge social issues and many young people more prone to crime and disorderly behaviour. Farnham in 1851 had a population of about 9000, Dorking 6000, Godalming 6,000 Guildford about 8,000 and Reigate 5,000. The population of the Surrey police area was about 100,000.

1851 February 1: GO 8: First commendation given to PC James Walker for the way he conducted himself in a felony case and was promoted from the third to second class of constable. In March 1852 Walker was reduced again for drunkenness. He resigned.[6]

1851 March 10 GO 19: The Chief Constable is extremely displeased to find that Superintendent Hollington (late Guildford Borough Police) has allowed one of the constables under his command to ride the county horse which was sent for the his especial use in consequence of which the horse has been thrown down and might have been seriously injured. The Chief Constable desires that in future Superintendent Hollington will on no account whatever presume to authorise anyone to ride the horse provided for himself at the

[6] Surrey Constabulary General Orders Book 1 1851-

expense of the county and the Chief Constable further desires that no superintendent's horse shall be allowed to stand at livery, and Superintendent Hollington is directed immediately to procure stabling for his horse elsewhere and to employ PC Broad to look after it.

1851 April 29: GO 35: **County horses** are not being cared for and were not to be ridden at a greater speed than 6mph.[7] There were many messages about horses which received a great deal of attention and were not allowed out in the wet! If sick the horses were taken to HQ they had to be walked. From Reigate the horse would be led to Dorking and then a luckless Dorking officer would have to walk the horse to Guildford and then presumably walk back although there was train travel available.

1851 June: GO 50: In the first five months **eight men were dismissed** mostly for **drunkenness.** Some examples: John Lawrence was severely reprimanded for signing a report without reading it, and again for wearing plain clothes on duty the following month. Richard Langridge allowed a prisoner to go into a public house whilst he waited outside. Henry Cook was dismissed for being drunk and enlisting. John Smith was fined ten shillings and reduced from first to second class for fraudulently claiming exemption from the toll and not being on duty. In large type in the discipline record on 6th November 1852 William Earl was dismissed for insolence to the chief constable.

1851 June: Surrey Constabulary: Advert for six strong horses about 151/2 hands high and fit for saddle or draught, with saddles for same, are proposed to be taken upon job for the purposes of above mentioned force, and kept by and at the expense of the said Force in different parts of the county; it is also intended to hire upon job for the like purpose six new and substantial Whitechapel carts with harness for the same persons desirous of supplying the above mentioned articles upon job are invited to deliver tenders on or before Wednesday 23rd instant at the office of the Clerk of the peace hereunder mentioned, specifying the price of each article for six and also for twelve monthly. Woronzow Greig Clerk of the Peace, Record office, North Street Lambeth June 13 1851[8]

1851 June 19: GO 52: Insufficient use is being made of the **county cart** for the carriage of prisoners.[9]

1851 July 27: Constable John Page 1st Class Constable and acting inspector at Chobham is **appointed inspector** at twenty three shillings a week. (Note – there were no sergeants)[10]

1851 Detection rate: There was not a great deal of crime but those prosecuted had an excellent chance of acquittal, in fact an even chance, possibly because of poor investigation and case preparation by untrained and inexperienced police officers**.** The large number of arrests in proportion to the recorded crime further evidences this. It seems as if the constables locked people up to take them to the superintendent for further investigation. Invariably the superintendent would take prisoners before the magistrate to be interviewed as happened before the formation of the police.

1852 May 1: GO 78: Between 1 June 1851 and 30 April 1852 thirty-one **men were punished** mostly for drunkenness and neglect of duty.[11]

1852 June 5 GO 83: A constable was sentenced to **fourteen days in prison** with hard labour at the magistrate's court for not surrendering all his police clothing when he left the Force.[12]

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[7] Surrey Constabulary General Orders Book 1 1851-
[8] Lloyds Weekly Newspaper
[9] Surrey Constabulary General Orders Book 1 1851-
[10] Surrey Constabulary General Orders Book 1 1851-
[11] Surrey Constabulary General Orders Book 1 1851-

1852 July 14 GO 84: At 0930 on the 17th inst., at 0930 seven superintendents, six inspectors and sixty-four constables had to be at HQ in Guildford. This was almost the entire force. No reason was given but this may well have been a **major operation** for the Force.[13]

1852 August 4 Lingfield: Guildford Assizes: A prisoner named Moses Betts was tried on a charge of burglary at Lingfield. PC Richard Langridge Surrey Constabulary was examined as a witness for the prosecution. In the course of his evidence he prevaricated and fenced with the questions that were put to him in such a manner that the learned judge ordered him to stand **committed for ten days** for contempt of court. Betts was acquitted

1853 July: Newdigate: PC **Horace Henry Coe** was on duty in Newdigate and whilst passing over a footpath leading to Mr Finchley's pheasant preserves he was met by a man who asked him if he had been out in the storm. He replied in the affirmative when he was immediately afterwards knocked down by two other men who fell on him and with a razor **attempted to murder him** by cutting his throat. They succeeded in inflicting a wound in his neck three quarters of an inch deep and nearly an inch and a half long. They then ransacked his pockets and stole there from a green silk purse containing £1.10s in gold and a quantity of silver after which they dragged him for a distance of fifty feet to a brook where they hurled him leaving him for dead. The poor fellow managed to crawl away and having given information to Mr Page superintendent of police, a search was made for the guilty parties. They have not been apprehended as yet. [14]

Horace joined the Surrey Constabulary in January 1853 after six years service in the East Suffolk Constabulary. He was given the collar number 21 and was the 151st recruit to the force. Described 27 years, 5 feet 11 inches, dark complexion of proportionate build he was married with one child and by trade was a wood ranger born near Claydon in Suffolk. He was a fourth class constable who on the 21 July 1853 was **dismissed for gross misconduct**.[15] Did he make it all up? Seems to be dramatic to cut your own throat but what other explanation is there?

1853 December 31 GO 105: Between 1 May 1852 and 31 December 1853 twenty-three men were **dismissed** with drunkenness predominant.[16]

1854 November 17: Inspector Edward Wilson **dismissed for frequenting a public house** and acting as landlord therein

1854 December 31: Guildford Borough Police was re-formed under the command of Mr Goff who was appointed 27 October 1854. Goff died on the 31 December 1854 and George Vickers appointed.

1855 February 17: Letter from Chief Constable to the press: There are in the Surrey Constabulary 1 Chief Constable 7 Superintendents 5 Inspectors 70 Constables total 83; Guildford 11 constables, Reigate 11 and Dorking 11. It is not true that the ratepayers of the parish of Woking pay £228 per annum for the services of one constable there being two resident in the parish, one of whom lives in the town of Woking; in addition to which there are no less than six other constables, who meet and patrol together in pairs almost nightly throughout the different portions of the parish, thus affording every protection to the parish. I can give my assertion -- the amount of crime not only in the parish of Woking but throughout

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[12] Surrey Constabulary General Orders Book 1 1851-
[13] Surrey Constabulary General Orders Book 1 1851-
[14] The Globe
[15] From Surrey Police 21 April 2011 appointment register Surrey Constabulary
[16] Surrey Constabulary General Orders Book 1 1851-

the county generally having greatly decreased since the establishment of the "rural police system".

1855 April Chief Constable's report to the Rural Police Committee: That depredations frequently occurring on the borders of those counties which have not accepted the Rural Police are very difficult of detection for example, in the year 1854 there were two burglaries, four sheep stolen, two horses and several cases of fowl stealing known to have been committed by thieves residing in Berkshire whom it is impossible to bring to justice from the petty jealousy and unwillingness on the part of the parish constables to give any information, so they do form the facilities afforded for the disposal of stolen property."[17]

1856 April 29: In the course of the discussion on Friday upon the Police Bill. **Lord Lovaine** said as chairman of the police committee of Surrey he wished to bear his testimony to the value of the county constabulary. Before they had the constabulary neither life nor property was safe in the county, but the magistrates were forced into action by the fact that nearly every good house in the county had been broken open, and at last a dreadful murder was committed. The consequence of establishing the county constabulary was that throughout the county there had been peace and security, which never existed before. When he first sat on the bench at Guildford there was hardly a day when the court rose before four o'clock and they generally sat till six, but now two hours were amply sufficient in which to get through the whole of the business.

Mr Evelyn complained that the noble lord who had spoken during the debate had said that life and property were not safe in the county of Surrey till the introduction of the rural peace in 1851. He (Mr Evelyn) had lived in Surrey all his life and he certainly had not been conscious of danger (hear, hear). An unfair use had been made of the Frimley murder; but they might just as well argue for the metropolitan force from the catastrophe in Rupert Street (hear, hear). The truth was it was only by accident that the burglary was accompanied by murder (laughter). Every burglar was morally a murderer; and even in the Frimley case it was generally understood that the man who actually did the atrocious deed was not the most criminal of the three, for he was not the instigator of the outrage. He did not think there was much in the argument that none of the counties had agreed to discontinue its police after having once established it, There could be no doubt that the Home Secretary would refuse his assent to any resolution of that kind and therefore there was no encouragement to raise the question. He was bound in candour to admit that a majority of the Surrey magistrates were in favour of the force, but not the majority of the ratepayers (hear, hear).[18]

On July 29 1855 at just after midnight Inspector Donaldson and Constable James Freestone were in the Market Place in Haslemere supervising the turning out of the public houses and enforcing the end of permitted hours. There was a report of trouble with "Navies" and Inspector Donaldson pushed his way into the crowd in the King's Arms to encourage them to leave. They would not go and trouble started which developed into a riot. One of the men who led the initial attack was arrested and taken to the lock-up in the Market Place. A marauding crowd armed with sticks and clubs surrounded the lock-up demanding the release of the prisoner. Mr Donaldson refused to release his prisoner, whereupon he was struck a serious blow to the head with a heavy iron bar leaving him on the ground bleeding profusely. Although fatally wounded he left the scene and was later found staggering about the street. He was helped back to his home where he died shortly before 3am.

[17] Durrant P 13
[18] 1856 April 29 The Sussex Advertiser, Surrey Gazette