



SOUTH WALES POLICE
MUSEUM

50 years of policing the Welsh capital



The History of Policing in Wales

50 years of policing the Welsh capital

On the 20th December 1955 after 30 years of campaigning by residents of towns and cities across the country, Cardiff was officially chosen as the capital city of Wales.

Wales didn't have a capital for four centuries after the Acts of Union passed under King Henry VIII in 1536, so the appointment of Cardiff was a very special occasion indeed.

Early 1950s

The 1950s were a time of rapid expansion for Cardiff, with a population of 243,500 and growing, new city housing was developed, but this created new policing challenges.

Three police stations were built in Rhymney, Ely and Llanishen, and officers had to contend with more responsibilities for road safety; the key policing issue for the 1950s.

Traffic regulation, the prevention and detection of offences and collision investigation became a key focus as more and more vehicles were using the highways.

1954

Mr Francis Thomas was appointed the ninth Chief Constable of Cardiff following the retirement of Mr W J Price after 44 years service.

3,080 crimes were reported to police during the year, which was consistent with previous years.

However, the number of road accidents in Cardiff continued to cause concern. Fewer people died in collisions, but more people were injured on the roads.

In 1953, civilians were recruited to help school children cross the road. This helped to reduce road deaths.

1955

Officers under the rank of Superintendent were granted an extra rest day each fortnight, which created additional administrative duties. This reduction in staff, coupled with the difficulty of attracting new recruits, adversely affected efforts to reduce road casualties.



Annual Crown Inspection of Cardiff City Police in the grounds of Cardiff Castle in the early 1950s, by F T Tarry Esq, HM Inspector of Constabulary

The number of motor vehicles registered in Cardiff dramatically increased from 14,557 in 1938 to 29,728 in 1955, and the number of driving licences from 22,950 to 49,456.

Research showed that the majority of accidents were caused by road users, failing to comply with the elementary rules of the road.

In 1955, officers also made a concerted effort to combat crime caused by youth gangs, popularly known as 'Teddy-boys'. They were known for using offensive weapons such as bicycle chains, coshes and razor blades to intimidate the general public, but the police response was successful.

1956

Officers proposed to ban private cars from Cardiff city centre to reduce traffic congestion and related crimes such as thefts from vehicles. During 1956, there were 514 of these offences, the highest ever recorded.

Youth crime increased significantly too, with 46% of all acquisitive crime offences committed by the under 17s.



Cardiff City Police Badge

The number of assaults against police officers also increased. There were 71 cases in 1956 as opposed to 48 in 1955 and 36 in 1954.

Some of the assaults were vicious, one constable was so badly injured that he was absent from duty for 132 days.

1957

This year, the primary concerns for Cardiff police was the increase in indictable offences; the lack of new recruits; the inadequacy of police stations on large housing estates and the poor condition of existing police stations.

The issue of falling female police recruits was also raised. Female officers were first recruited in Cardiff City Police Force in 1947, but of the 18 officers initially appointed, only five were still in post.

From 1947 – 1957, 40 resignations were submitted (mainly because of marriage). In 1957, only 15 women applied to the force as opposed to 78 men.

From these applicants, only two women were appointed.

4,341 crimes were recorded in total; significantly higher than the 3,515 offences recorded the previous year.

These offence figures were the highest ever recorded in Cardiff's history, and reflected the increasing crime trends in other parts of the country. The principal increases were in burglary and theft.

Social changes since 1900, namely progressive legislation on the treatment of convicted criminals, a greater spread of economic prosperity and the introduction of the welfare state, made these figures both surprising and disappointing.

The Police Pillar Scheme was launched in March, and enabled Divisions and Headquarters to contact patrol cars and constables. This meant information could be passed between officers and stations via the direct telephone lines from the pillars.

Previously, the only means of contacting a police officer was by searching the beat or waiting for the constable to call from their nearest station.

1958

41 officer vacancies made the plight for new recruits even worse this year.

Crime reached a new high of 5,754 offences.

1959

This year saw an upward trend in recruitment, and the number of vacancies dropped to 27.

This was a big help to some constables, who had been working two or three beats during a tour of duty on bicycles to ensure all areas were covered.

Even though the number of open vacancies had reduced, Cardiff was still in a worse position than Merthyr or Newport however, where the population per officer was 439 and 507 respectively. The population per officer in Cardiff was 552.

Cardiff also had a greater shortage of police than the cities of Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester; areas that were highlighted as having a lack of officers.

The practice of employing civilians to relieve constables for police duties continued, with the number of civilian employees standing at 43.

Crime fell this year with the recorded number totalling 5,673 as opposed to 5,754 in 1958. However, serious crime involving violence and most forms of theft continued to increase.

The number of assaults against the police also increased by 66%, from 58 to 96.

A new police station officially opened on 1st April at Highcroft, Llanrumney, and the Home Office agreed to build a new station in Llanishen and to renovate Canton Station.



The Cardiff City Police Motor Cycle Section was established in 1962

1960

The number of police officers didn't change much this year. On 16th November, the Royal Commission on the Police published an interim report containing recommendations for the pay of constables. The recommended increase was substantial, with the hope of attracting future recruits.

Chief Constable Francis Thomas again voiced concerns that a full complement of officers would still not be enough to adequately police Cardiff.

Cardiff Police Cadets were established this year, and 12 boys were appointed. The scheme was a stepping stone to join the force as a regular officer in future.

The number of attacks on the police this fell by 23.

1961

By 1961, the effects of the pay increase recommended in the Royal Commission on Police report were evident. For the first time in years, Cardiff Police Force was almost up to full strength.

Police cadet applications also far exceeded the number of vacancies available.

The pay increase didn't affect the number of female applicants. However, the lack of female applicants was probably due to the conditions of service and varied hours of duty. Also, women couldn't join before the age of 20, and may have already established careers by that point.

Crime increased again this year with 893 more offences than the previous year. Over the last five years, crime in Cardiff had risen by 97%.

1962

The Secretary of State permitted the Cardiff force to increase by one Chief Inspector, three Inspectors, six Sergeants and 40 Constables. This would bring the strength of the force, including police women, to 512.

However, Chief Constable Francis Thomas remarked that only 14 out of 106 constable applicants were found suitable, and suggested that the pay for a constable still did not compare favourably with other professions.

A new police station opened in Canton, replacing the inadequate building that had been erected on the site since 1882. Sub-divisional stations were also built in Ely and Llanishen, where previously only cottage stations existed.

Crime this year increased by 282 offences, mainly due to burglaries and fraud.

1963

Chief Constable Francis Thomas died in office. Thomas Gwilym Morris was appointed as the new Chief Constable of the Cardiff Police.

1964

Under the provisions of the 1964 Police Act, Home Secretary Right Honourable James Callaghan, MP for Splott in Cardiff, announced that the Glamorgan, Cardiff, Swansea and Merthyr Tydfil police forces would amalgamate.

Traffic wardens began duty in Cardiff for the first time, and on the 27th July, the Fixed Penalty Procedure was introduced. At this time, the punishment for being

ticketed was £2, and the fee had to be paid at the office of the Clerk to the Justices within 21 days.

A Women Police Cadet Scheme was launched to encourage female recruitment.

A fall in crime was reported for the first time since 1954, with 8 fewer offences than the number recorded in 1963.

1965

The Home Secretary permitted the Cardiff force to appoint 194 officers over the next three years, as well as nine boy cadets, three girl cadets, and 30 civilians.

The purchase of nine vehicles was also agreed.

Assaults on police officers increased from 94 to 126. This means around one in four officers in Cardiff were assaulted on duty this year. Senior officers hoped that the increase in officer numbers would prevent offences.

The Police Amendment Regulations of 1964 reduced the working hours of Constables through to Chief Inspectors from 44 hours per week to 42 hours from the 1st July 1964. However, due to vacancies, reduced hours weren't introduced in Cardiff until 10th February 1965.

Crime increased by 2,020 offences from the previous year, with a total of 9,892 crimes recorded. Detected crime increased, with 720 more crimes detected in 1965 than in 1964. 328 more criminals were also arrested.

1966

The foundation stone for the new Police Headquarters in Cathays, Cardiff was laid by Mr George Thomas, Minister of State for Wales on Friday 29th July. He was accompanied by the Chairman and members of the Watch Committee.

The force establishment increased from 562 to 636 staff, providing a more efficient service to the city.

Crime increased by 1,884 offences, with a total of 11,776 offences recorded.

1967

The introduction of Unit Beat Policing was approved this year.

Unit Beat Policing would equip all officers on the beat with blue and white panda cars, and allow them to wirelessly communicate with the force control rooms. This meant police could respond quicker to calls for help, covering an area six times larger than a colleague on foot.

Unit Beat Policing was expected to cost approximately £30,000.

Crime increased by 303 offences, but this was considered low as the force area had grown to include Whitchurch and Rhiwbina.

1968

The official opening of the Headquarters of Cardiff City Police in Cathays Park was held on Thursday 22nd August.

Mr Stephen Brown, QC, described it as "a Headquarters superbly built and lavishly equipped."

Unit Beat Policing was launched on 25th March 1968, and in this final year of Cardiff City Police, 12,485 crimes were recorded.

1969

A new force, the South Wales Constabulary, officially launched in 1969.

With 2,397 members of staff, the force was the largest in Wales and policed almost half of the population.

Since police forces were established, their actions were accountable to police authorities made up of respected members of the community.

From their establishment in 1835 until their abolition in 1969, the Cardiff, Swansea and Merthyr Tydfil Borough Forces were accountable to Watch Committees of elected councillors.



The Foundation Stone for Cathays Police Station is laid

From 1841 until the Local Government Act of 1888, Glamorgan Constabulary answered to the Magistrates of Quarter Sessions.

From 1889, a new body known as the Standing Joint Committee presided over police matters. The committee composed of both elected County Councillors and Magistrates, and political manoeuvring was endemic. This came to light when the amalgamation was announced.

The Conservative party controlled the Standing Joint Committee and the Labour party dominated Cardiff City Watch Committee, and both groups argued long and hard over whether the capital should retain an independent force.

The Government ordered an inquiry into the matter, and finally ordered the amalgamation to proceed.

1970

This year marked a recruitment crisis in the South Wales Constabulary.

After the amalgamation, voluntary resignations increased above average, with the majority of submissions from experienced officers with five to 10 years service. The main reason for departure was the prospect of higher earnings elsewhere.

This problem was exacerbated by a reduction in the number of hours worked each week. From 1st April 1970, the working week was reduced to 40 hours from 42 for Constables through to Chief Inspectors.

Constables were paid overtime to cover the deficit, but it was too expensive to compensate the higher ranks.

The reduction in working hours hence produced a loss equivalent to 126 police officers.

Annual leave entitlement also increased by three days, making a further loss of 7,578 working days, or 30 police officers per year.

Crime by young people rose dramatically, which was attributed to drug misuse. 40% of detected crimes involved offenders under 17-years-old, and 23% involved offenders aged 17-20.

The Cardiff drug squad were instrumental in bringing down a ring of LSD suppliers and cannabis exporters.

Six people were arrested for possession of LSD, and two American citizens were arrested in London for possessing cannabis they had collected from Cardiff to export.

The squad also apprehended another American citizen in London for drugs offences.



Cardiff City Police Headquarters at Cathays, Cardiff

The South Wales Constabulary made a concerted effort to raise awareness about their responsibility to prevent crime amongst the public.

An exhibition was held at Cardiff Headquarters called: 'Prevention and Social Role of the Police in relation to Drug Abuse'. It was held for four weeks as part of the National Crime Prevention Campaign.

1971

The former Chief Constable of Cardiff City Police, Gwilym Morris, was appointed as the new Chief Constable of the South Wales Constabulary.

1972

This year, the first ever arrests for possession of heroin were made in Cardiff. A fraud squad was established to investigate commercial crime and allegations of corruption, and Port Terminal Teams were introduced to monitor arrivals at Rhoose Airport and Swansea Harbour to prevent terrorism.

1975

In accordance with the Sex Discrimination Act, the policewomen's section of South Wales Constabulary ceased to exist, and the discriminatory WPC prefix was abolished.

1976

A school truancy scheme was introduced in Cardiff. It was organised by educational welfare officers who patrolled department schools apprehending truants.

1978

At the start of 1978, the force had 110 fewer officers than the year before. By July, a further eight officers had left the force.

Lord Edmund-Davies established a Committee of Inquiry to consider police pay. The anticipated rise in pay halted the downward trend in officer numbers, so by the end of 1978, the force had 2,886 police officers, 14 more than at the beginning of the year. The overall strength of the force was still down by 183 officers though.

Extra funding from the police authority led to 35 civilian posts being filled.

1979

In 1979, applications to join the force were the highest ever in the force's 10 year history.

225 police officers were appointed.

65,803 crimes were reported, vandalism became a growing problem and a scheme was introduced in Cardiff to discourage school children from trespassing and committing vandalism on building sites. A building company partnered with police and offered football kits to the schools in areas with zero vandalism.

The Home Office forensic science laboratories in Cardiff and Bristol merged and transferred to a new premises at Chepstow.

A big police operation in December saw eight plain-clothes officers patrol the shopping centres and car parks of Cardiff to prevent shoplifting and car crime.

42 arrests were made (50% of whom were professional shoplifters), and property worth over £2,300 was recovered.

The former CID and Licensing offices in Cardiff Central Station were named as the new site for the Eastern Area Control Room.



Personal radios and small panda cars were the combination which allowed Unit Beat Policing to be introduced

1980

South Wales Constabulary now had a full establishment of police officers with 2011 men and 545 women expressing an interest in joining.

This figure was the highest ever, and reflected society's concern with job security in the face of industrial and economic recession. Officers spent a total of 3,638 working days policing demonstrations. This was equivalent to a loss of 16 officers for the full year.

The standard issue of personal radios and the increasingly widespread use of cars had revolutionised the way officers worked their beat, but people believed the enhanced technology had broken the bonds between the police and the public.

As a result, 'community' officers were introduced in 1980 to rebuild relationships. In July, a new section of the M4 which ran from Castleton to Coryton opened, creating new policing challenges.

1981

As a result of proactive policing, recorded crime increased by 6.47%, below the national 10% average.

A school watch organised by crime prevention staff and community constables was set up, making young people aware of their responsibilities to protect their schools, property and the environment.

On 1st April, a one-tier system of area control rooms was introduced. This meant officers now reported to the control room for their area, be it Cardiff, Bridgend or Swansea. This year, a police liaison panel chaired by the Chief Superintendents of the two Cardiff divisions was also set up to discuss race relations with representatives from different ethnic groups.

1982

In 1982, Community Watch was introduced. It created a forum for communities to speak to local officers about crime and neighbourhood issues.

1983

Mr David East was appointed Chief Constable of the South Wales Constabulary. Community Watch launched in the Radyr and Morganstown areas of Cardiff in March.

1984

The Miner's strike began on 6th March, placing extra demand on the police. The first Schools Liaison Police Officer was appointed in September, ensuring the force stayed in contact with 110 comprehensive, junior and infant schools in the area.

1985

Associated British Ports stopped employing British Transport Police at Cardiff, Barry, Port Talbot and Swansea docks, so 44 officers were redeployed from these areas.

There were a number of high-profile events that required policing this year, including royal visits, and football internationals, the Wales vs. Scotland World Cup Qualifier in September at Ninian Park, the Wales SDP / Liberal Alliance Conference, and the ongoing miners strike.

Over 3,000 hours were spent policing such events, which impacted community policing.

In March, a pro-active street squad was created to focus on arresting offenders. By the end of the year, 337 people were charged with burglary.

The 'Never Go With Strangers' project was introduced in 30 Junior Schools to encourage child safety.

1986

For the first time ever, over 100,000 crimes were recorded in the South Wales Police Force area.

The number of assaults carried out on Cardiff police officers increased dramatically and disorder at football matches was also on the rise.

The force worked with West Mercia Constabulary in a week-long operation to identify offenders, and eight people were subsequently charged.

Drug misuse was still an operational priority, and one single seizure of heroin on a Cardiff street had a street value of £2.2 million.

Two hotlines were launched in Cardiff and Sandfields for people to report anonymous information about drug misuse to the drugs squad.

One major incident during the year saw animal liberation activists plant three incendiary devices in three major stores in Cardiff. Officers safely defused the devices.

1986 also saw the force buy the Old Brewery Offices in Norbury Road in Cardiff, with the intention of building a new Divisional Headquarters.

1987

A Property Marking Scheme was launched in Cardiff schools. In 1987, the Cab Care Scheme was introduced in the city. Officers began to report incidents and crimes to cab companies, who then alerted all their drivers so they could look out for leads or wrongdoing during their shift.



Facial reconstruction alongside a photograph of Karen Price

Four members of the Animal Liberation Front were also arrested and charged this year with incitement and conspiracy.

1988

A scheme was introduced in Cardiff to independently review the care offered to offenders. It illustrated the difficult task carried out by police officers under trying circumstances.

Two people were arrested for a nationwide fraud on the Department of Health and Social Security. The fraud netted over £3 million.

1989

A new Divisional Headquarters for Cardiff opened in Norbury Road, Fairwater.

A pilot scheme for investigating child abuse was launched to evaluate the extent of the problem and improve partnership working between police and child abuse agencies.

Eight new Neighbourhood Watch schemes were introduced in Cardiff, and a police consultation panel for Butetown was introduced.

The police service section of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme was reintroduced. 152 young people aged 14-18 years participated in bronze, silver and gold courses.

In December, the skeleton of a young woman was found by builders, wrapped in a carpet and buried in the garden of a block of flats in Riverside.

Investigators reconstructed the victim's face in clay to identify her as Karen Price.

DNA testing, coupled with other forensic and detective work, resulted in the conviction of Idris Ali

and Alan Charlton for the murder, sometime between 1st July 1981 and 1st May 1982.

1990

South Wales Constabulary was faced with severe financial restraints this year. In order to prevent a budget overspend of £857,000, restrictions were imposed on recruitment, overtime and vehicle mileage.

Restrictions on civilian recruitment further aggravated the situation when 21 constables had to be deployed in force control rooms to cover the shortfall in civilian staff. A review of management and divisional workloads was undertaken to streamline procedures, improve work dissemination and enhance communication and command.

The body of a young woman named Geraldine Palk was found in school playing fields in Cardiff shortly before Christmas. A murder investigation was launched, and her killer was convicted eleven years later following the development of DNA genetic fingerprinting.

The total cost of the investigation was £400,000.

1990 also saw the launch of SPLASH, the 'Schools and Police Liaison Activities for Summer Holidays' scheme.

1991

Financial difficulties continued into 1991, making it difficult to buy new vehicles, improve buildings and fund emerging ICT.

Crime increased substantially in comparison to the previous year. A total of 156,308 offences were recorded; an increase of 17.32% compared with the previous year.

In September, South Wales Constabulary reduced its eight territorial divisions and 21 sub-divisions to 14 local divisions. This saved the costs of senior officers, support staff, and building work.

New Superintendents were renamed Divisional Commanders, enhancing their status and public accountability.

Serious public disorder broke out in Ely during this year. This may have been triggered by the Ely Quality Initiative, a scheme established by South Glamorgan County Council and Cardiff City Council to reduce deprivation in Ely.

Between 150 and 200 police officers went on the streets of Ely to tackle the disorder, and extra community officers went on patrol in Ely, Canton and Grangetown.

The responsibility of policing Cardiff continued to bring demands uncommon with the rest of Wales, such as large sporting events. Occasionally, officers from other parts of the force came to Cardiff to help police the city on match days.

The Cardiff Marine Watch Scheme launched this year to deal with the continued development of Cardiff Bay. The scheme encouraged owners to register their marine equipment.

Crack cocaine was seized in Cardiff for the first time in February. This was the result of a long-term surveillance operation.

1992

After an increase in house burglaries across the city, a Neighbourhood Watch seminar was held at South Glamorgan County Hall, and a Neighbourhood Watch newspaper was launched by the Cardiff crime prevention panel.

Establishing Neighbourhood Watch schemes in the developing areas of Cardiff Bay was deemed a priority.

1993

This was another difficult financial year, and Chief Constable Robert Lawrence signed off a budget plan to prevent the force overspending by £2 million. The possibility of temporarily closing Ely, Canton, Cardiff Docks, Roath, Whitchurch, Llanedeyrn, St Mellons, Cathays, and Penarth police stations was considered, in order to save £100,000.

However, due to government intervention, the idea was never pursued.



Canton Police Station, Cardiff

1994

The Radyr Police Office in the Old Church Rooms opened this year, serving the Radyr and Morganstown areas of Cardiff. This was the first permanent police presence in the area for 20 years.

1995

This was a monumental year for the force, as its name changed from South Wales Constabulary to the modern South Wales Police.

1998

South Wales Police reported its lowest rate of reported crime since 1989, and successfully policed the European Summit in Cardiff.

1999

A new policing challenge was faced by Cardiff officers when the Rugby World Cup came to the city.

2000

The force launched investigations into unsolved cases following breakthroughs in DNA evidence and testing. The Geraldine Palk murder in Fairwater was one of the first to be reviewed.

2001

In 2001, South Wales Police solved the murder of Geraldine Palk. Her killer had evaded the mass DNA swabbing exercise carried out in Cardiff during the decade after her death in 1989. However, random DNA tests on inmates at Dartmoor Prison led police to a man called Hampson, who was close to finishing a four-year sentence for assault. He was taken to Fairwater Police Station for questioning, and eventually charged with Geraldine's murder.

After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York in September, South Wales Police began to resource the Airport Policing Group in Cardiff Airport.

2002

From 2002, police officers were permanently deployed at Cardiff International Airport as part of a wider strategy to prevent terrorism.

A new crime unit was formed between South Wales, Gwent and Dyfed Powys Police to tackle the threat of illegal drugs and organised crime.

Chief Constable Anthony Burden received a knighthood at an Investiture in Cardiff Castle.

2004

This year, Miss Barbara Wilding was appointed as the first female Chief Constable of South Wales Police, and the first in Wales.

More police officers returned to the beat in north and east Cardiff by merging the Rumney and Llanishen divisions.



Chief Constable
Barbara Wilding

Following a police operation in St Mellons, crime fell by 46% in just four months. A new team of cycling police officers took to the streets of Canton and Cathays. The bikes allowed officers to respond to call-outs in areas that other police vehicles may not be able to attend and increased contact with the public.

2005 and beyond...

Cardiff continues to thrive as a vibrant capital city, and over the last few years, officers have been privileged to police major global events such as the 2012 Olympics, the Diamond Jubilee, high-profile concerts and sports matches.

Indeed, officers are now policing more than 400 events every year. Tackling violent crime and anti-social behaviour continues to be a priority.

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