



SOUTH WALES POLICE  
**MUSEUM**

# PC James James

## A Victorian Policeman



*The History of Policing in Wales*

# PC James James

## A Victorian Policeman

Police Constable 95 James James joined the Glamorgan Constabulary at Merthyr Tydfil on the 17th September 1860. He was just seventeen years old.

**PC James was extremely committed to his chosen career, even giving misleading information about his age to secure an appointment.**

This was unusual for the period as life for a policeman in those days was particularly hard.

### Conditions of service for a Victorian Policeman

“When constabulary duty's to be done, The policeman's lot is not a happy one

– Pirates of Penzance, 1879

Applicants to the Victorian police had to be at least 5ft 9in and aged between 18 and 27.

If applicants were married, they were allowed no more than two children.

Only one day off per fortnight was allowed, and there was no Sunday or public holiday entitlement. Constables and Sergeants were only allowed one week's holiday per annum.

The bulk of the recruits were countrymen, so the starting salary of 18 shillings per week was very attractive!

PC James James joined the Glamorgan Constabulary at a time of great uncertainty for police forces in the UK.

At that time, Britain was very disorderly and undisciplined. Crime, especially theft, was



PC James James

commonplace, and many people feared that the nation was on the brink of revolution.

However, despite this, the introduction of formal police forces was met with stiff resistance.

British people prided themselves on being freemen and were fearful that an efficient police force, potentially modelled on the army which was used to quell incidents of public disorder, would turn them into slaves.

PC James James would have witnessed a dramatic shift in attitude by the end of his service.

In 1837, the year Queen Victoria came to the throne,

there was only one formal police force in Great Britain: the Metropolitan Police Force in London.

The next thirty years would see every county and sizeable town create a similar force.

In 1841, the Glamorgan Constabulary was established.

Changes in the police were paralleled by changes in the punishment system. The death sentence was abolished for minor crimes such as shop lifting, and a modern prison system that favoured reform above punishment was born.

By the time Queen Victoria died in 1901, the system of law and order was very similar to present day.

Britain had become a safer society.

## Police Uniform in the Victorian Era

**PC James James received his uniform on 22nd September 1860.**

He was given:

- One staff (truncheon)
- One belt
- One cape and strap
- One pair of leggings
- Two great coats
- Two dress coats
- Five pairs of trousers
- Two hats
- Two leather neck stocks
- Three button brushes
- Three button sticks
- One rattle
- One lantern
- One pair of handcuffs (No. 124)

When PC 95 James James joined the Glamorgan Constabulary in 1860, he looked like a Metropolitan officer.

He was issued with a reinforced top hat, white trousers and a blue tailed coat. This was the fashion of dress for gentlemen of that period. The colour choice was chosen to make officers instantly recognisable, but different from a soldier!

After 1864, there were changes in fashionable civilian dress and a growing acceptance of the police.

Police began to model their uniforms on the military.

As a result, PC James James was supplied with five essential items of equipment to help him carry out his duties.

## Decorated Truncheons



**The first item in this essential kit was a decorated truncheon. At that time, an officer's truncheon was proof of his identity.**

Decorated truncheons were made of wood and featured a coat of arms, the reigning monarch's crown and the name of the police force issuing the truncheon.

PC James would have carried his truncheon in a long pocket concealed inside his trousers.

Decorated truncheons were an officer's proof of identity until the 1890s when warrant cards were introduced. They proved to be a far better means of identification, even though they didn't initially feature officers' photographs.

The style of truncheon, however, remained the same until the 1980s, when the polycarbonate 'PR24' baton was introduced. This style of baton allowed officers to defend themselves and restrain prisoners.

The PR24 baton was later replaced by the 'ASP'. The ASP baton is made from metal developed for the aerospace industry, and expands with a flick of the wrist from 7ins to its full 26 ins length.

## 'D' Cuffs



**In Victorian times, PC James James would have used handcuffs to arrest a wrong doer.**

Every officer was supplied with two pairs of wrought-iron 'D' cuffs; so called because they resembled the letter 'D'. One pair were designed for arresting adults and the other, children!

PC James had to arrest minors for various offences such as theft of food and coal and vandalism. The Education Act, which ensured a school place for every child, didn't come into being until 1870; ten years after PC James joined the force.

The 'D' cuffs had a large key which had to be screwed in and out a hole at the edge of each cuff to open and

lock them, and they were non-adjustable.

Although these cuffs were impractical, as they took too long to put on, they remained in use in the Glamorgan Constabulary until the 1970s.

They were finally replaced by the aluminium 'Quick Cuff', the precursor to the modern handcuffs that officers use today.

PC James would have carried his cuffs in his trouser pocket.

## Snips



**'Snips', also known as 'Figures of Eight', were unofficially used instead of 'D' cuffs to restrain prisoners who fought against arrest.**

The police officer would push an unruly criminal's hand up behind his back, slide on the Snips and twist if the prisoner struggled.

This method of arrest was eventually banned in the 1950s because it often resulted in sprained or broken wrists.

## Rattle



**Officers were issued with rattles so they could contact other officers if they needed help.**

The rattle was made of wood and PC James would have carried it in his coat pocket. However, one of the disadvantages of the rattle was that it could be used as a weapon against police officers.

PC James was attacked with his own rattle. He retired from Glamorgan Constabulary early, partially due to the injuries he sustained.

The rattle was awkward to get out in an emergency, and because they were made of wood, they wore quickly. Not many have survived.

In the 1890s, rattles were replaced with metal whistles.

PC James hung his from a button-hole on his tunic.

The whistle had several advantages over the rattle. It was easier to carry, it was louder, and it could not be used as a weapon against a police officer.

Whistles were eventually replaced by personal radios, and today of course, officers also keep in contact via mobile phones.

## 'Bull's Eye' Lanterns



**Finally, PC James was issued with a 'Bull's Eye' lantern. These lanterns were so-called because they resembled the eye of a bull.**

Lanterns were issued so officers could see where they were going at night. Street lighting was limited or non-existent in those days.

A wick would be lit inside an oil-filled container in the lantern to set it alight.

PC James wrote about a conversation with Superintendent Wrenn in his notebook in 1861, requesting a new lantern.

He complained that his lantern burnt his fingers and stained his uniform.

He also stated that his face would be covered in soot in the mornings and it was difficult to remove.

Although this was a frequent complaint from officers, the Bull's Eye lantern was used until the 1920s.



SOUTH WALES POLICE



SOUTH WALES POLICE  
**MUSEUM**

**South Wales Police**

South Wales Police Headquarters  
Cowbridge Road, Bridgend CF31 3SU

Email: [info@south-wales.pnn.police.uk](mailto:info@south-wales.pnn.police.uk)

Telephone: 01656 869291

Visit our website at [www.south-wales.police.uk](http://www.south-wales.police.uk)

Designed and Printed by South Wales Police Print Department.

KEEPING SOUTH WALES **SAFE** THROUGH TIME