



SOUTH WALES POLICE  
**MUSEUM**

## History of the **Neath Borough** Police Force



*The History of Policing in Wales*

# History of the Neath Borough Police Force

The Neath Borough Police Force was established on 9th February 1836.

**David Protheroe was appointed as the first police officer to serve for the force. When he gave evidence at the Assizes for the first time, the counsel asked Protheroe if he was the Chief of Police. Protheroe confirmed this was true, so counsel then enquired how many men there were in the new Neath Police. Protheroe answered, "Myself, sir."**

The Report of the Municipal Corporation Boundaries of England and Wales 1835-1837, stated that in Neath:

“ There is at present only one policeman maintained in the town at a cost of £52 per annum, the amount being partly raised by private subscriptions, partly out of the rate for lighting. ”

Protheroe remained the sole force representative until December 1837, when he was replaced by Jenkin Francis. Francis became the head officer, and Samuel Stephens and Thomas Francis were appointed as his assistants.



Neath Police, Pictured in the 1920s

In May 1837, Jenkin Francis resigned, and three officers were subsequently appointed: Penry Gwyn, William Rees and Edward Davies. These appointments imply that Samuel Stephens and Thomas Francis also left the force at the same time as Jenkin Francis.

The challenge for the new Neath Police to keep its staff, continued.

Penry Gwyn did not remain in office long; records show that he was given a month's notice the following November. As a result, the force reverted back to operating with two police officers and remained at that strength for ten years.

On 14th August 1841, the Cambrian newspaper reported on the quarterly meeting of Neath Town Council. They quoted the payment to William Rees and Edward Rees (in error of Davies) in the sum of £6 10s and £5 4s respectively for their quarter's salary.

With the departure of Penry Gwyn, William Rees became head officer, with Edward Davies acting as his assistant.

However, these officers do not appear to have satisfied the council, as they were both given their notice the following December!

Interestingly, only William Rees actually left the force. He was replaced by William Morgan in May 1842.

## Captain Napier's Concerns

**Captain Charles Napier, Chief Constable of the Glamorgan Constabulary, recognised that policing the town of Neath with just two officers was totally inadequate.**

He felt that Neath would be policed far more efficiently by merging Neath Police with the Glamorgan Constabulary.

The merger was proposed by Quarter Sessions but the town authorities would not agree to it.

Quarter Sessions also recommended setting up a joint police station and gaol to serve both forces.

This suggestion was also declined by the Town Council in 1842. Instead, they decided to build a gaol of their own.

However, this decision was reversed at a later date, because a joint police station and gaol was built as originally suggested.

## The James Street Gaol

**The new police station and gaol was built in James Street.**



Neath's First Police Station and County Gaol

It comprised of two identical wings, but sadly, the building proved to be a disaster.

The chimney was poorly constructed and smoked whenever a fire was lit, and the gutter that ran underneath overflowed with raw sewage and manure. This piled up in the slaughterhouse yard behind the station.

In February 1844, the council decided to change officers again, so Morgan and Davies were given one month's notice.

Two new policemen were appointed, with the head officer occupying the new gaol house rent-free.

In March, William Rees returned to the force, and in April the same year, Thomas Owens was appointed.

William Rees was the most experienced so was appointed the head police officer, but he was evidently reluctant to reside at the gaol house. This would have been understandable given the appalling conditions there.

Nevertheless, an officer had to live there, and records show that this responsibility fell onto the new recruit Thomas Owens.

Tragically, the cholera outbreak of 1849 killed Thomas Owens.

Despite Owens' death, and Captain Napier's repeated attempts to amalgamate the force with Glamorgan Constabulary, the borough did little to improve the conditions of the building and the county police station didn't move to new premises until 1862.



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