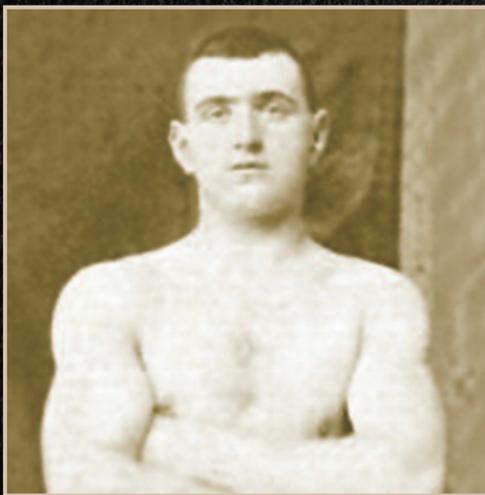




SOUTH WALES POLICE
MUSEUM

Superiority in Strength: The Physique of Officers in Early Policing



The History of Policing in Wales

Superiority in Strength: The Physique of Officers in Early Policing

Life was tough for the labouring classes in the 19th century, particularly in the developing industrial towns.

Wages were low and employment was insecure. Depressions in trade left families in debt, where starvation was a real danger.

Able-bodied men wandered over the countryside searching for work, and gravitated towards the iron and mining towns of South Wales.

However, some were as willing to commit crime as they were to work, just to survive.

The number of poor people only increased as hundreds of families driven from Ireland by the potato famines came to Wales to seek work and sustenance.

There wasn't enough work for everyone, and people were forced to live in squalid conditions. They found shelter in hovels, threw up shacks or went to the verminous low lodging houses that sprang up in every town.

In his report of December 1842, Captain Napier said:

***“The County is infested with vagrants....and in consequence of this influx the low lodging houses have been crowded to excess. In rooms of not more than 12 feet square sometimes sleep indiscriminately four and twenty men, women and children, naked on straw, their clothes being detained for security of rent.*”**

***“In such conditions, brutality thrived, and brutishness was displayed in work and play. In the towns the worthless and lawless, aptly described by the Vagrancy Act as the “idle and disorderly,” “the rogues and vagabonds,” and the “incorrigible rogues,” tended to herd together and to form gangs for mutual protection and for planned mob lawlessness. Soon they had sections of the town to themselves, for when they moved in, in numbers, local conditions deteriorated so much that respectable inhabitants soon moved elsewhere.”*”**



Unknown Police Officer in the Late 19th Century. He displays the Kind of Physique sought after by Police forces of the era

The lodgers left these 'dens of iniquity' to prey on the better parts of the town. It was very dangerous for someone who wasn't a criminal to venture into these dens, which were known as 'China' in Merthyr. The reigning gangster was known as the 'Emperor' and his partner was the 'Empress'.

As well as the people flocking to the county to seek work, workers on the railway lines, known as 'Navvies', added to the growing population.

Strong, inured to hardship and almost always drunk outside of work, the Navvies waged constant battles with the locals who resented them taking up local employment.

Gang Culture

The true hallmarks of masculinity in this period were stamped by a willingness to fight (taking part in a 'rough-house'), and heavy drinking.

Fighting wasn't always the result of a disagreement or hostility; it was considered healthy exercise and the winning men were rewarded with adulation.

The heroes of the time were the strongest men, and their reputation stopped them being targeted by thugs.

The leaders of the criminal gangs were always men of immense physique and a bullying character. They only stayed in charge as long as they could frighten or defeat anyone who challenged their leadership.

Paid police officers were the first real challenge to these gangs and reigning bullies.

However, ordinary working men didn't have a favourable view of officers, simply because they interfered with the rough pleasures of the era, such as heavy drinking.

Unfortunately, this meant that officers rarely had assistance from the public during difficult incidents, and were left to deal with fights single-handedly.

The accepted code was that in any fight, the issue was between the contestants, and outsiders shouldn't interfere and sway the result.

When county police forces were introduced in 1839, the minimum height standard for officers was set at 5ft 7ins by the Home Office.

However, it soon became apparent that officers needed to be superior in height, build and courage in order to fulfil their duties competently. It was not enough to be above the average in height and strength; an officer had to be considered a giant to command respect, or to have a chance of survival in the more turbulent areas.

Although records of 'vital statistics' are not available, it is evident that Glamorgan Constabulary Chief Constable Captain Napier set a high physical standard for members of his force; particularly those due to serve in Merthyr, Dowlais and Aberdare.

In a court martial, Captain Napier threatened to send a man from a rural district to Merthyr, where he would be: "knocked about a bit."

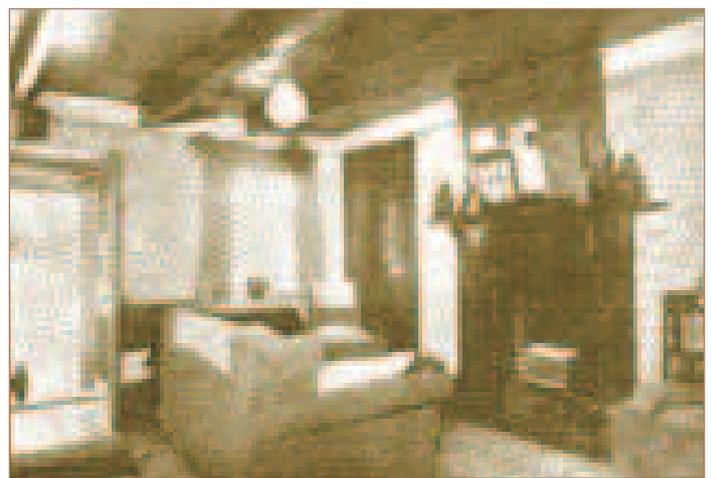
Superintendents frequently wrote to the Chief Constable to request that the high recruitment standards be maintained. Although it was difficult to recruit suitable men, smaller men were of no use!

The Physiques of the First Glamorgan Officers

The physiques of the first serving officers of the Glamorgan Constabulary were documented during the period.

In 1847, a newspaper reported the pillars of an old chapel in Merthyr collapsing under the weight of the "redoubtable" Sergeant Hume.

Another officer, Sergeant William Jenkins, was able to single-handedly rescue Chief Constable Captain Napier and a Swansea constable when they were beaten down in an attack at a farm house by four men and two women.



Room at Cwm Cille Fach Farm where Captain Napier was attacked

Sergeant Thomas Thomas (PC 28 in 1841) was described in 1850 as a "very big man."

Also, an encounter in 1842 between Merthyr Sergeant Davies and Shoni Scubor Fawr, a strong local bully, resulted in Sergeant Davies overpowering Shoni without resorting to back-up. After this incident Fawr left Merthyr, perhaps due to shame.

The following year he was involved in the Rebecca Riots in the west, and was then transported for his involvement in the murder of an old woman.

The below incident reports show the willingness of police officers to meet force with force, even with the odds stacked against them...

January 1842:

“At the police court three men were charged with being drunk and fighting in a mob amounting to 200 congregated in Ponstorehouse, among whom some well-known blackguards from that nest of inequity, the Cellary. They were also charged, with others, with assaulting a police constable and rescuing a prisoner from his custody. Another man was charged with inciting the mob to throw stones at the constable.”

February 1842:

“Three men were charged with committing a most savage attack, with a mob, on Sergeant Dawkins and PC William Fair, at Dowlais. When the Sergeant attempted to arrest one man, the mob, about 150 strong, commenced an attack on the officers by throwing stones. Sergeant Dawkins was knocked down by a stone and the prisoner made a savage attack on him by biting a part of his nose nearly off. The stones were described by witnesses as falling like a shower of hailstones.”

March 1842:

“Superintendent Davies, after the case had been heard, addressed the magistrates in connection with the threats directed against the police by the bullies of the town and said that he wished to assure these bullies and blackguards that he and his men were not a lot of schoolboys to be frightened by such, and were ready to accept the challenge at any time.”

Any challenge to a police officer from a criminal was accepted as personal. If an officer refused to accept a fight, it would have weakened the authority and prestige of the force.

However, the challenge had to be met on equal terms, man to man.

In November 1847, officers at Aberdare Police Station were challenged by a man named Richard Hackford.

It became the duty of Sergeant Sadler, as the man in charge of that station, to accept the challenge.

Sergeant Sadler was originally from Middlesex and joined the Glamorgan Constabulary in Merthyr in July

1842. He was made Sergeant of Aberdare in March 1845, and was promoted to Superintendent of Bridgend in January 1849.

Sadler served in Bridgend until January 1877. During his career, he made a number of headline arrests and received a sum of monetary awards.

On this occasion, a £5 reward for detaining the challenger was available, which may have swayed him to accept!

Richard Hackford, also known as ‘Hereford Dick’, was a mighty man who proudly boasted that it took six police officers to arrest him.



Richard Hackford, alias "Hereford Dick"

He escaped from custody at Hereford prison through sheer physical strength, and went to Hirwaun to work. He proclaimed that he was perfectly safe in Hirwaun because there weren't enough police officers in the neighbourhood to take him back to custody.

At that time, there was only one constable in Hirwaun and one sergeant and constable in Aberdare.

The Hereford Times told the story of what happened next:

“The recollection of the escape of Richard Hackford from Hereford Gaol is doubtless, fresh in the memory of many of the readers of the ‘Hereford Times.’ We have now to lay before the public an account of his recapture which will confer long and lasting honour on the determined spirit and

indomitable courage of a police officer. £5 was offered by Mr Kettle, governor of the Gaol, for the recapture of Hackford. Strange to say, however, the offer of this reward had not the desired effect until Friday last, almost 7 months after his escape. Hackford is a man who few, single-handed, would dare to attack, especially in the neighbourhood of his late residence where he was much dreaded and deemed invincible.

Hackford is in the vigour of his manhood, being about 32 years of age, upwards of 5ft 10 ins in height, possessed of great muscle and wonderful strength. So much for Hackford.

Now a word or two about his gallant capturer, who for many a day will bear evidential tokens of "hot work", engaged in while attempting and effecting the capture of his formidable opponent. Richard Sadler is a young man, about 28 years of age, of about Hackford's height but more slenderly built. He has, however, a great deal of bone and muscle and doubtless great lasting strength, which in fact, he must possess to have enabled him to stand the contest he did, with his renowned and formidable foe.

For several days, Sadler, having read a description of his person, had become aware that Hackford was in the neighbourhood of Aberdare, and at a quarter past 5 o'clock on Friday morning, the 20th November, was on the look-out for him at Hirwaun Common, on which common Hackford was employed as a "patchman," one we understand, who removes the surface soil for the operations of a miner.

The gallant Sergeant of Aberdare was all alone at that hour of the morning, for he scorned to take anyone with him to assist him, being determined to gain all the laurels and all the profits of capture for himself. Not long had the gallant Sergeant been on the Common where he saw Hackford, in company with several other men who were employed in the same work. The Sergeant immediately went up to Hackford and told him he was his prisoner, when Hackford begged of the Sergeant to let him go, which was of course a "no-go." With the Sergeant, Hackford then walked quietly for a few yards, when he endeavoured to kick up the Sergeant's heels, and in return the Sergeant knocked him down with his fist.

A desperate encounter with alternate success then ensued between the two. The Sergeant then called upon one of Hackford's companions, who were looking on, to assist him, instead of which one fellow

took the staff from the Sergeant's pocket and handed it over to Hackford, who then commenced beating the Sergeant most unmercifully upon the head, body and legs with his own staff, scoring his head frightfully. The Sergeant at length regained possession of his staff by throwing Hackford down and wrestling it from him, beat him about the head until he was almost insensible.

Hackford recovered a little and pulled out of his pocket a large clasp knife with which he stabbed at and cut the head of the Sergeant in a dreadful manner, to which we can testify having seen the wounds. The Sergeant then used all his efforts to take the knife from him, on which Hackford threw it to one of his companions. The combatants took fresh breath and then fought again with renewed desperation till at length the Sergeant succeeded in placing one of the handbolts on one of the prisoner's wrists.

This having been done a young man came by who assisted the officer to place the bolts on the other wrist, and then he was soon conveyed to the Station House at Aberdare, and thence his gallant captor brought him to Hereford at about quarter past two on Saturday morning, when we dare say Mr Kettle received his old acquaintance with great hospitality, and very cheerfully handed the reward to the gallant captor.

We understand that in addition to the £5 given for the recapture of the prisoner by Mr Kettle, a subscription was entered into at the Black Swan Hotel in this City on Saturday evening last, when £5 more was collected for this gallant fellow."



Hackford engaged in combat with an unknown man

SOUTH WALES POLICE



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Designed and Printed by South Wales Police Print Department.

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