ON THE BEAT

Night shift with the West Midlands police

The first thing I noticed when I entered Fletchamstead police station was a plaque commemorating the death of PC Gavin Carlton who was shot in December 1988. A testimony to the inherent dangers of police work, reinforced by the sign in the report room which stated "Be alert, Stay alive".

The shift, which started at 10pm and lasted until 7am, began with a briefing during which the officers were told of things to be aware of for that night, before setting off in their respective cars.

Now, I thought, time for some action. I was ready for a night of car chases, flashing lights and perhaps a pub brawl or burglary for good measure. Yes, I admitted, I watch The Bill. Whenever The Bill was mentioned it raised a knowing smirk. 'I wish all cases could be solved in half an hour' said one officer and another was quick to point out that on The Bill they never have paper work; which seemed to be the bane of the constables' lives.

I was to join two WPC's Kate and Sue and we made our way in the panda car to our first call which was a burglar alarm. It turned out to be a false alarm, as did the other four alarm calls I went to. One officer, Steve, said that of all such calls up to 90% were set off by a spider or by a fault and these amounted to a great drain on police resources.

Later I transferred to a traffic car. These are fast response cars and we reached an exhilarating speed. Suddenly the light and siren were switched on and we did a U turn before pulling up beside a Montego out of which three youths were scrambling. The eldest was immediately arrested and put in the back of the police car. Assistance arrived and the other two were separated for questioning. The street was now ablaze with flashing lights. I was amazed at how quickly it had all happened. Later when I asked the arresting officer why he stopped them he simply answered, 'I just knew'.

At first all three denied that they were driving and said it was a 'mate's car'. The eldest said he was being 'stitched up' and began getting very agitated. Despite persistent questioning the youth did not admit he had been driving the car. All three were placed under arrest and taken to the police station for further questioning.

Between 10pm and 1am was very busy and we were constantly responding to calls which ranged from a neighbour playing loud music to people throwing stones at a house, reports of vandalism at the cricket pavilion and a pub fight at which the police presence seemed to defuse the situation. There were also a number of 'domestic' calls. One involved a 15 year old boy who said someone had entered his home and hit him. As the police probed further they uncovered a web of family rivalries. The boy was adamant that he wanted to press charges: however, because of his age, the police arranged to return the following evening and talk to him with his mother present. The next night he was not in. The police did not seem surprised explaining that he had probably 'cooled off'. 'Often they just want to get it off their chest', an officer explained.

Coventry Evening Telegraph

We were also called to the local children's home where the appearance of the police seemed to act as provocation and just produced sniggers from the two girls who had returned home late and had not paid the taxi fare. The police deal with a variety of cases which one might typically think of as social work. As one officer put it 'we are the social service of the last resort'.

During the early hours the number of calls declined and a sense of weariness set in. More time was spent patrolling, or 'flying the flag', than responding to calls and officers refuelled themselves at the 24 hour service stations with sticky buns and tea. As we were driving along, the officers were scanning the streets for anything suspicious, from an open back gate to a person who avoided looking at the police car.

I was shown an overgrown playing field, the site where Carl Kennedy, the young boy battered to death just yards from his home in May 1992, was found. He was from the Willenhall estate. It was a run down 60s council estate, windows were boarded up, doors and walls were battered with holes and syringes littered the curbs, evidence of the drug problem. The police cannot even leave cars outside the sub station here because they would be vandalised. One officer told me police work had made him terribly cynical, adding that 'you have to be'. He said that one of his biggest shocks when he joined was, 'the way some people exist, you can't call it life'. However as Steve reminisced, at the time of Carl's death he saw a side of Willenhall he had never seen before. People pulled together as a community.

On Saturday morning, just as it seemed the calls had stopped coming from the control room, a car was seen driving erratically and was signalled to pull over. The man would not blow properly when asked to take a breath test and, despite it being explained to him that if he failed to supply he would be arrested he refused. At the station he was given further opportunities before being read his rights. At this stage, surrounded by three officers with papers to sign, pockets to empty and the prospect of a cell, he visibly began to panic and started shouting. The custody officer responded by shouting him down and an air of tension filled the room. By the end of the shift four of the cells were occupied. For many of those arrested it must be a very confusing and intimidating experience. For the police an arrest meant a success, and also more paper work.

Contrary to what I had gleaned from cops and robber dramas police work is really a much quieter occupation. Long periods of patrolling in the early hours are interspersed with responses to a variety of types of incidents. This more mundane reality of everyday policing may not have lived up to my image of a world pulsating with action and excitement, but as one officer commented, 'you never know what the next call will be'.

Thanks to the staff at Fletchamstead Police Station for all their help.

Kirsty Cunningham *is a student at Warwick University*

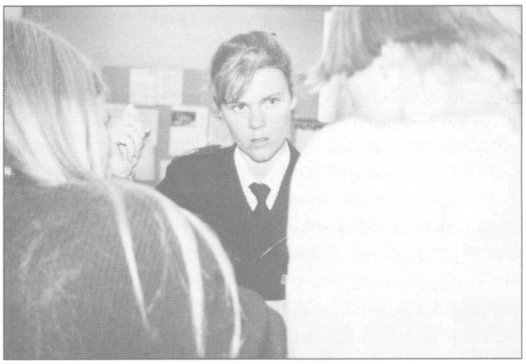
FAIRER COPS?

Questions about women in policing

Women have worked as uniformed police officers for most of the twentieth century, yet their role still gives rise to a considerable number of questions, not least from female officers themselves. On the day (5th August 1994) this article is being written, a letter from Alison Halford, former ACC of Merseyside has been published in *The Guardian* in which she complains about her poor treatment after her 'exemplary career as a top cop'. *Woman's Hour* (BBC Radio 4) has carried a feature about the small number of women officers trained for firearms duties in a Welsh force. Why are women police in the news? What is the background and what are the issues and what bearing do they have on wider concerns about policing our society?

Women on Patrol

The first female police officers went on patrol during World War 1. Their tasks were to protect women and children and to act in moral and sexual matters. Their arrival marked the success of campaigns to introduce women into policing which had gained wide support in Britain and the USA since the late 19th century. Although there were elements of equal opportunities in these campaigns, their primary focus was on social welfare and the morals of society. Bringing women into policing was seen as a way to remoralise a decadent world. After the war, there was a long struggle before women were finally accepted as sworn, uniformed officers (only in 1933). Their tasks were confined to work with child and female victims and offenders and this largely remained so until the 1970s. In consequence, the numbers of women officers remained low and they had their own separate promotion structure.



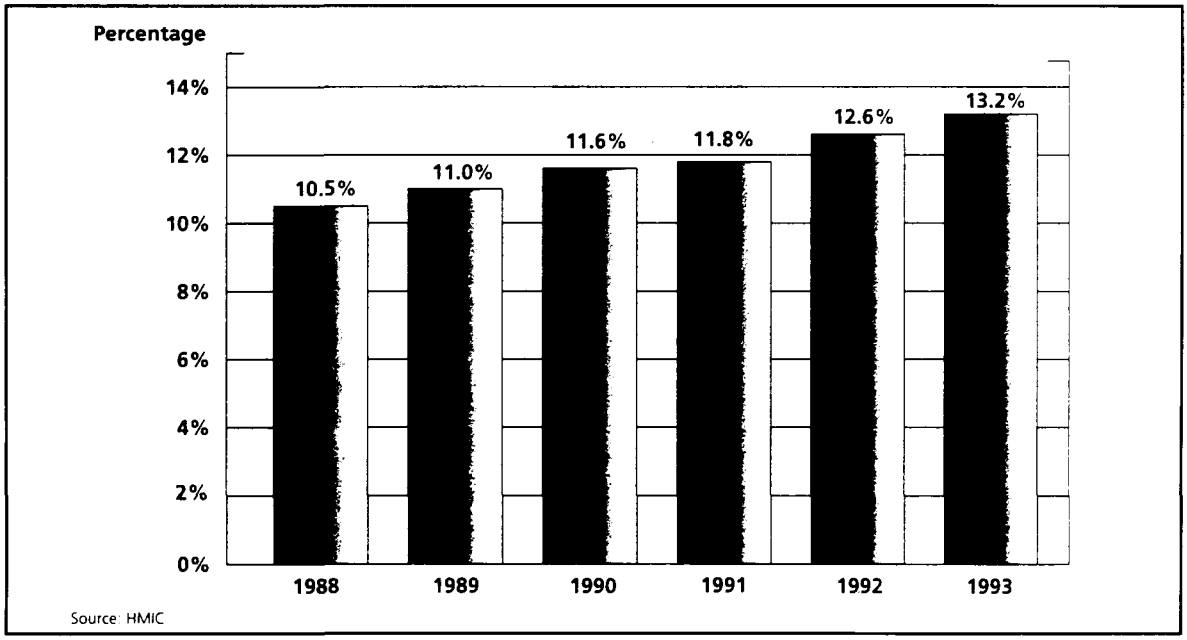
Almost overnight this changed in the 1970s when women police departments were integrated and female officers took on full policing duties. 'Nothing will ever be as traumatic again', one officer who went through this period told me in an interview many years later. A similar process of rapid integration also took place in many US police departments at this period.

In the US, however, a series of research studies evaluated the performance of female cops, especially on patrol, and found that they were just as effective as their male colleagues. Since integration the percentage of police who are women has increased in both nations. It is actually somewhat higher (at 12%) in Britain than in the US where it remains around 9%. Senior posts in the US police are, often, of course allocated through the political process and there have already been several female chiefs of police. As yet no woman has been appointed as Chief Constable in Britain, although Elizabeth Neville has recently become DCC in Northamptonshire.

Police women have reached all but the highest office in British policing. They are effective and dedicated officers serving on equal terms and they and their predecessors have been in the service for much of this century. Why therefore is their role still in question? Where do the problems lie?

Where's the problem?

Until the 1980s there was little research carried out in this area in Britain and relatively little concern. Recently, however, a range of independent studies and official reports have highlighted some of the key issues. Three main problems can be headlined as Discrimination, Discouragement and Deviance. Both academic research and reports of work carried out from the police themselves indicate that discrimination has certainly occurred in the past. In 1989 the Home Office issued a circular about Equal Opportunities in the police service which set out objectives and guidelines for implementation.



Police strength - female officers - England and Wales

A FORCE FOR CHANGE

By March 1992 all forces in England had written equal opportunities policies. However, research has continued to suggest that women officers feel discriminated and discouraged and that a major problem is the sexual harassment they experience from their male colleagues.

Various recent examples have been given of this, from the detailed account of episodes in her career by Alison Halford, the vivid ethnography from Malcolm Young (former Superintendent) as well as more serious allegations of rape. Behind this pattern of unprofessional behaviour seem to lie deep-seated assumptions about the macho nature of policing, that it is an unsuitable job for women.

Towards a new millennium

These are antique and inappropriate notions for a new millennium on many counts. Female officers have proved themselves in all types of policing and in every deployment from dog handling to domestic violence. Public expectations about the police and what priorities they should pursue have changed. A new 'gendered' agenda has been tabled: domestic violence, abuse of children, sexual crimes, especially rape, the support of victims all rank higher than they used to. While female officers do not **automatically** deal with these subjects more successfully, and many skilled males can do so, it cannot be claimed that these are unsuitable tasks for women.

Recent newspaper reports suggest that the police themselves wish to retain their wider community and preventive mandate. They do not wish simply to prosecute a war on crime.

For these reasons it is clear that women have a crucial role to play in policing, by bringing the full range of abilities and perspectives into law enforcement. Policing in Britain and America has common roots and has sometimes shared developments. There are, nevertheless, US examples which we should not wish to follow. After the beating of Rodney King at the hands of LAPD officers, the Christopher Commission reported on that department. They pinpointed an exaggeratedly macho culture and recommended that female officers be more widely deployed. The costs and consequences of the King case are only too well-known.

Frances Heidensohn *is Professor of Social Policy, University of London, Goldsmiths' College.*

The Black Police Association

There has been much research over the last three decades which has highlighted the often poor relations between the Metropolitan Police Service and 'black* communities'. (*In this article the term black will used to describe people of African, African Caribbean and Asian origins). Research and anecdotal evidence has also pointed to the fact that significant numbers of black police officers have been the victims of discrimination and racist treatment at the hands of their colleagues in the Service and also resentment, sometimes violent, from black members of the public.

Because of concerns about the high rate at which black police officers were leaving the Service, several seminars were held at Bristol University in 1990. These seminars were organised by the Service's personnel department in an attempt to find out the causes of this disproportionately high wastage rate. The majority of serving black police officers were present and expressed a wide range of concerns.

A number of the officers remained in contact and several of us attended a two day 'Fairness Community Justice' conference at the Police Cadet Training School in February 1993. Representives of the Police Service and a wide range of organizations were present and an important theme running throughout the two days was the need to convert good intentions into action.

It is against this background that a small group of police officers and members of the Service's civil staff came together to consider what we could do to promote fairness and justice both within the Service and within the wider community.

It was agreed at an early stage that we needed to establish a formal structure within which to operate. We needed to establish ourselves as a group of professionals who were committed to supporting the aims and objectives of the Metropolitan Police Service. At the same time we understood the need to retain a degree of independence so that we could, if necessary, express views and promote ideas with which other members of the Service may feel uncomfortable.

We are in the process of developing a work programme which will help us to achieve our six objectives which are:-
to provide a support network; to work towards equality of opportunity; to work towards improving relationships between police and black & Asian people in London; to help to improve recruitment and to reduce wastage; to assist in policy development; to provide a social network.

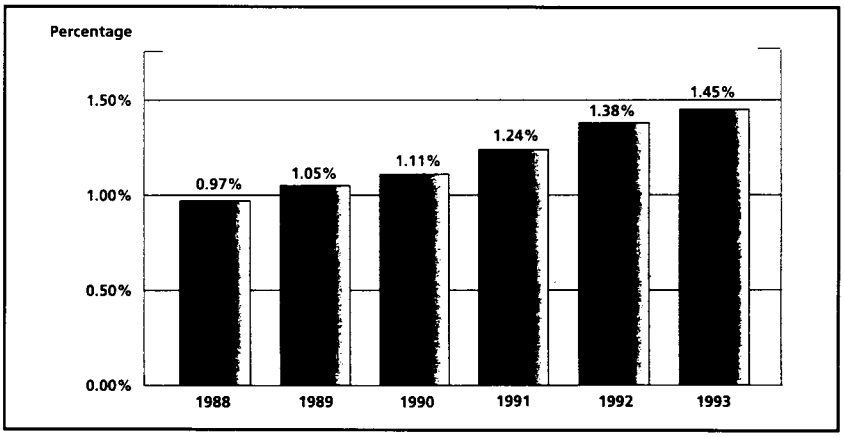
We consider that as black members of staff we can make a positive contribution to policing London if we work together to promote these objectives. It is our aim to work in conjunction with all sections of the Service and we are currently consulting with Service managers and staff associations to establish how best we can collaborate.

We were encouraged by the positive signals which the Met. gave out when they organized the 'Fairness Community Justice' conference and by the Commissioner's personal commitment to tackling racism:

"..... we must be totally ..... intolerant of racially motivated attacks, of those who indulge in racial abuse and of those who use hatred and violence as the tools of their political expression .... We must be equally intolerant of our own colleagues who fail to reach the required standards".

The formation of the Black Police Association is not an end in itself. It is the beginning of a process which we hope will contribute to the Service's efforts to improve its quality of service and to ensure fair treatment for all.

Ron Hope *is a Chief Inspector in the Metropolitan Police and is currently Community Liaison Officer for Lambeth.*



HM Inspector of Constabulary's Report 1993

Police strength - minority ethnic officers - England and Wales