

We know very little about the recruitment of chief constables since the new police were formed in the 1830s.¹ Even where the literature does address the police, it tends to emphasise the lowly constable rather than the chief officer. Knowing who chief constables are is very relevant to present and future debates over police management.

Artisans, auto-crats, bobbies, bureaucrats

David Wall examines the history of chief constables.

From their introduction in the early nineteenth century, the provincial borough and county police forces were locally controlled and this principle of local governance remained unchallenged from the formation of the new police until after the First World War. During this period, the management of the police was a very amateur affair in the sense that it was not organised along professional lines. Before the 1920s, the local nature of policing was also characterised by the Home Office's relative lack of interest in the police.

Early days

Chief constables were little more than 'gifted amateurs' and in many cases not so gifted. County chiefs, of which there were about 55,² tended to be ex-military officers who were appointed mainly because they shared a similar social position and outlook to the county police authority.

Borough chiefs, on the other hand, of which there were more than twice as many as in the counties, tended to be serving police officers. However they were chosen more for their trustworthiness than for either their policing abilities or achievements. Moreover, their position, unlike the county chief, had no statutory basis, as

control over the police was placed in the hands of the Watch Committee: the position of borough chief developed through practice. One simple way to illustrate the difference between the personal status of the borough and county chief constables is to compare the frequency of their inclusion in directories of elites.³ In 1906, for example, 82 per cent of county chief constables in office that year had an entry in a directory of elites, compared with 6 per cent of borough chiefs.

Recruiting from within

Labour unrest during the late 19th century, the police strikes of 1916 & 18, the fear of Bolshevism, combined with the bureaucratic inconvenience of dealing with 180 or so individual organisations, encouraged the Home Office to (re)consider its position over the police. So, following the report of the Desborough Committee in 1919,⁴ but in the absence of formal statutory authority, the Home Office sought to increase its influence over the police.

The Home Secretary determined who police managers would be by framing rules and regulations (esp. Reg. 9) under the Police Act 1919; the Home Office continued its newly developed practice of directing the police with circulars that offered centrally determined guidance about best police practice; it encouraged the develop-

ment of a 'professional' relationship between the police forces; it encouraged chief police officers to see themselves both as part of a wider policing function and also as operationally independent of their police authority. Importantly, these strategies were underpinned by the establishment of a policy, later an ideology, of internal recruitment which made the principle of appointing chief police officers from within the police appear to be natural and logical.

Moreover, they strengthened both the formal and informal links between the police and the Home Office and had the long-term effect of weakening the domination of the police by their police authorities, especially in the boroughs. Their impact has been to change police management from being an amateur activity which relied upon local models of management and practice, to a becoming professional activity that is informed by a shared knowledge and underpinned by centrally determined core values, yet locally responsive, although in an accounting rather than account-taking way.⁵

Consequently, the type of person who became chief constable changed after the 1920s when they were chosen more for their police and management experience. Ever distrustful of central government, the county police authorities sought to resist the policy of internal recruitment by recruiting their chief constables from the colonial police rather than the home forces. Not only did these individuals satisfy the police regulations, but they were often of the same social ilk as their predecessors. This pattern of resistance continued even after the Home Secretary's powers over the police were greatly increased by the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939. The



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county police authorities subsequently sought to recruit the graduates of Lord Trenchard's short-lived officer class scheme.

In 1948, a national police college was opened at Ryton-on-Dunsmore, from where it moved in 1960 to Bramshill to become the Police Staff College. The broad function of this college was to sustain the policy of internal recruitment by educating potential senior officers and training them for command. The main vehicles for the training of chief constables are now the advanced promotion (exceptional) and strategic (ex-senior) command courses.

A new elite

Underlying the development of the police in the UK has been a powerplay between local and central government over control of the police. During the past one hundred and sixty years, the meaning and orientation of the police has changed from being a distinct instrument of local governance to becoming an instrument of central government policy.

The policy of internal recruitment has contributed to the realignment of the mechanisms which effect control over police management. It has reconfigured the social structure of police management so that as chief constables have changed from gifted amateurs into professional bureaucrats, they have also ceased to be part of the local ruling elite and have become instead, a very special, self-selecting and internally accountable, professional elite with links to the police policy making process.

Perhaps one of the most significant changes in the police has been the move towards a corporate structure of police. The recent introduction of national policing bodies such as the National Crime Squad and the National Crime Intelligence Service through the Police Act 1996, has created a legislative basis for a *de jure* national police force. Moreover, this position has been further strengthened by the increased police corporacy arising from the restructuring of ACPO.⁶

But, before historians look on

and argue that Peel's dream of a national police force has come true, we must also take account of much broader changes in policing that are taking place, especially the increasing pluralism of police agencies⁷ and increased emphasis upon the local governance of crime through partnerships⁸. So, in the not too distant future it is conceivable that the role of chief constable will change from being a chief executive to becoming a director of local police services. More importantly, this pluralism will cause us to think about the appropriateness of current appointment policies and to ask whether the policy or ideology of internal recruitment may have run its course.

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Footnotes:

1. Only Robert Reiner has made a systematic study of modern chief constables (holding office in 1986) Reiner, R. (1991) *Chief Constable: bobby or bureaucrat*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
2. After the Police Act 1964 and Local Government Act 1972 the number of chief constables reduced along with the number of forces, from about 120 to 41.
3. Many more characteristics are observed in Wall, *op cit.* 1998: Chs. 8&9.
4. *Report of the Committee on the Police Service of England, Wales and Scotland*. Part I: HC 1919 Cmd. 253 xxvii. 708; Part II: HC 1920 Cmd.574 xxii. 539; Evidence; HC 1920 Cmd.974 xxvii. 573.
5. see Reiner, R (1995) "Counting the Coppers: antinomies of accountability in policing", in Stenning, P. (ed) *Accountability for Criminal Justice: Selected Essays*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 74-92.
6. p.15, Savage, S and Charman, S (1996) "In favour of compliance", *Policing Today*, vol. 2., no. 1, pp. 10-17.
7. Johnston, L (1992) *The Rebirth of Private Policing*, London: Routledge
8. Crawford, A (1997) *The Local Governance of Crime*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In the early months of 1998 there has been another series of well publicised stories about female officers claiming against their employers over harassment, unfair dismissal and sexual discrimination. Yet not only is it more than 23 years since the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act

Women in policing

Frances Heidensohn reviews the state of play in terms of gender equality.

(which did not exempt police forces from its requirements) was passed, but research by Sandra Jones some ten years later showed that it was not well understood or implemented and this in turn led to the 1989 Circular reminding Chief Constables of their commitment to equal opportunities. By 1993 another study found all forces had written policies (Anderson, Brown and Campbell) but further reports from HMI Constabulary indicate continuing concerns and breaches. Subsequent research, notably by Jennifer Brown, demonstrates that the patterns found in the past and in enquiries in other countries continue.

Cultural barriers

Among the key aspects of such studies are that women continue to form a small minority of officers, even though the trend is generally for increased recruitment in many countries. Britain, with about 16% is at the higher end of the scale, with Sweden scoring the largest proportion in Europe, while some US cities, such as Detroit for example have figures in the 20%+ range. Women often form a larger percentage of recruits, but attrition rates are frequently higher. Deployment and promotion remain contentious areas, with evidence (again from Jenny Brown's work) of reduced numbers in higher ranks in some services and limitation in deployment with the most prestigious and high-profile positions mainly restricted to males. The



main barrier, however to achieving real and lasting equality in the police remains the culture which accepts or allows the kind of behaviour detailed in some of the publicised cases mentioned above and which women (and some of their male colleagues) report even after nearly a century of women in policing.

In an analysis of this problem I suggested that women faced three headline issues: Discrimination, Discouragement and Deviance in their careers and need particular tenacity and commitment to continue. Indeed, in an earlier project in which I compared British and American female officers and their careers, I found a notably strong

version of the 'sense of mission' which commentators on the police have always seen as a key feature of the professional officer. In the most recent studies too, there is evidence of what one might call 'the same story' on a worldwide basis, namely that women in law enforcement agencies experience harassment and hostility on a considerable scale. Differences arise nevertheless in how extensive and aggressive such behaviour is, and almost as important, how severe it is perceived to be. There are clear distinctions between nations and cultures over what is and is not acceptable. On one famous occasion, the then director of the European Network of Policewomen

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found herself being asked to judge a beauty contest of women officers in an East European state recently freed from communism. She had great difficulty explaining why this was not seen as appropriate to officers from western Europe.

What progress?

Such accounts, as well as the reports from research and inspections, can be depressing. There are, nevertheless, some positive aspects to note about this story. First, it is increasingly clear that the need for a real commitment to equality in policing is recognised. This recognition comes in various forms: an acknowledgement for the need for a diverse society to be fully reflected in its law enforcers, otherwise consent, traditionally the crucial element in British policing, may be threatened. In recent years it has been the under representation of black and ethnic groups more than of women which has caused greater concern. Recently recruitment drives have focused on the gay commu-

nity. There is now a much greater awareness at least among senior managers of the broader theme of what is known as the 'representative bureaucracy' issue.

Important changes within policing itself, notably various initiatives on management have had the effect of making the role of the police officer gender 'neuter'. The skills needed for success no longer are seen as those of the traditional macho officer, nor indeed of Sgt Dixon, the avuncular figure from Dock Green. Instead, the emphasis is increasingly on modern, skilled professionals who are well qualified, flexible and can handle newer approaches to managing social control.

Developments achieved by women themselves have had significant impact: there are three chief officers of major forces across the world, two chief constables in Britain, the first African-American women headed the dept in Atlanta during the Olympics held there. In response to concerns

over equality, organisations have been set up nationally and internationally to provide support, advice and training for women police.

Finally, a wide range of research studies has revealed how female officers try to overcome the obstacles they face with a whole repertoire of strategies and skills. In the piece of work mentioned above, I found British and American officers very similar in the thoughtful ways in which they handled public order situations, even though the US women were armed and the British were not. Other accounts suggest that police-women construct their roles to adapt and react to their situations.

The cause of equality in the police in this country began with campaigns directed from *outside*, by Victorian and Edwardian do-gooders who became convinced that the way to a better, more moral and orderly society was via having women sworn officers of the peace to patrol the lives of juveniles, and women. Nearly a century on there is another vision of equality in place, one that accords male and female and minority groups proper status and recognition in relation to law enforcement. The most important developments since then are that there are numbers of women inside the police who have pursued that goal, and that there is support from within senior management. It is difficult to argue that oldstyle cop culture still plays a useful role in present day policing. Eradicating it in favour of a more inclusive organisational style would be a worthy aim for the 21st century police.

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