

## History of women in Tasmania Police

Mrs Kate Evelyn Campbell was the first woman appointed as a policewoman to the Tasmania Police Force as it was then known, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1917 at Hobart. She was discharged in January 1918. Mrs Maud Hughes (Hobart) and Miss Maud Cross (Launceston) were added to police staff in 1918 with the particular duty of policing the “Infant Life Protection Act”, “Youthful Offenders, Destitute and Neglected Children Act” and “Offences Against the Person Act”. The women brought to notice a considerable number of children failing to attend school and traced and placed twelve young women in the city without home, money or friends. Use was made of the policewomen in escorting female prisoners and for the suppression of fortune telling.

The resignation of Mrs Hughes (1921) was followed by Miss Cross in 1922. Mary Jane Priest occupied a position from 1921 to 1933 in Hobart followed by Elizabeth Twitchett from 1931 to 1944. Ms Twitchett was forced to resign when she married which was a condition of employment at the time. It was then decided to appoint a permanent position in Launceston which was followed in 1944 with the appointment of a policewoman at Burnie.

The Annual Report (1953) informed that within the Policewomen’s Section, five policewomen and one Auxiliary policewoman based at Hobart and Launceston performed “useful work”, by giving attention to juveniles, assistance to female witnesses at courts and inquests, inspecting hotel lounges and assisting the Criminal Investigation Branch in certain classes of crime. The police women regularly patrolled the streets, parks and other places where young girls and children were advised and assisted.

In 1957 Sergeant Beth Ashlin was seconded to Victoria Police Force for a three week study tour which included visits to the Police Academy, Criminal Investigation Branch and Traffic Branches. Commenting on the secondment, Commissioner Knowles said;

“...Sergeant Ashlin’s visit emphasises the significance of the policewomen’s role in the modern police service. They are no longer just females in uniform confined to minor tasks. As in Victoria, our police women have equal jobs and responsibilities with the men. On every occasion they return an equal measure of service to the public, and we are very proud of their efficiency. We are indebted to Mr Jackson,, Victoria’s Commissioner of Police, for his invitation to send a senior police women to Victoria...”

The policewomen were not issued an official uniform but were paid an allowance to purchase a style of uniform which was usually a black suit and white shirt with hats and shoes of their choice. The Officer’s pattern cap badge was worn as a breast badge. Paid less than their male counterparts, police women had to be divorced, widowed or single and at least 25 years of age but during the late 1970’s, these rules were relaxed and increasing numbers of women started to enter the Force and the separate Policewomen’s Section ceased to exist.

By 1978, thirty-five policewomen were employed throughout the State and Inspector Beth Ashlin became the first woman appointed to that rank in that year, she retired in 1987. Since then, three policewomen have been promoted to the rank of Inspector - Inspector Heather Innes promoted in 1984 (resigned 1989), Inspector Lyn Jones promoted in 1997 and Inspector Fiona Lieutier promoted in 2002.

In March 1982, Cadet Course 12 was the first course into which female cadets were inducted. This course was also notable as it was to be the last course of cadets since the introduction of the scheme in 1971.

As 1993 drew to a close, policewomen were delighted with the announcement of a pilot scheme to allow former policewomen to return to the service on a permanent part-time basis. Six women were involved in the scheme initially. Policewomen now participate in every facet of policing and enjoy flexible employment conditions which encourage policewomen to remain in the organisation.

(Ref: Tasmania Police from Force to Service 1803 - 1999)