

The British are coming

by Darcy Erwin, Tasmania Police Librarian

A look at the movement of serving British police officers to Tasmania which was instrumental in averting a manpower crisis.

The migration to Tasmania of serving British police officers that took place throughout the 1960's, was largely a product of two desperations – that of Tasmania Police to lift manpower levels during a period when the State was experiencing rapid growth, and that of the would-be British immigrant to find a better life overseas. Any Tasmanian who had participated in police training in these years would remember the large numbers of Britons on these courses. In many cases, the 'club' atmosphere that prevailed amongst the migrants was so strong, that Tasmanian course members felt decidedly like outsiders.

Not surprisingly, the newcomers were viewed with suspicion by the locals. At times, suspicion grew into open hostility, and even today, it is not uncommon to hear the remark, "But they didn't stay long did they?" Well, did they?

There were 143 of them in all. Some were opportunists, some were adventurers, but in the main, most were honest, working men who saw a better life for themselves and their families on the other side of the globe. In their wake they left behind a melting pot of social change and largely unsatisfactory conditions, and on arrival, they came up against the antipodean culture into which in time they would either melt happily, or collide and become casualties.

Statistically, almost 40 per cent served 10 years or more and over 25 per cent reached retirement age. Only two were dismissed, and three died whilst serving. These figures are not bettered by the service records of local inductees, many of whom didn't stay long either. For the numbers people, Richard Brown stayed a month and Norm Wood knocked up almost 34 years when he retired on 5 July 2000, and that's the long and the short of it. These are interesting figures, and run counter to the comments that only a small percentage stayed until retirement and that most left within a year or two.

There are two 'immigrants' left in the job today – Phil Tustian, ex-Bedfordshire County, who joined on 27 Jan 1970 and John Blue, ex-London Metro-

politan, who joined on 17 August 1970. The end of an era approaches.

The Manpower Crisis

In the early 1960's, Tasmania's population was growing rapidly as the State experienced accelerated growth and development. New housing divisions were appearing and increased industrial activity was evident in the mushrooming of commercial and industrial enterprise. The consequential increase in population was putting considerable pressure on a police force that was understaffed and badly in need of additional officers. An indicator of this growth was the increase in authorised strength of almost 200 from 1963 to 1971.

However, suitable applicants were not coming forward in sufficient numbers to maintain an effective reserve, and those that were selected were barely enough to cover normal attrition and maintain the authorised strength. This situation was exacerbated by the unsatisfactory education standards of most applicants and by 1964, adequate police coverage was maintained only with difficulty.

Not only was there a need for more traffic patrols and increased suburban beat patrols, particularly for night coverage of growing city and suburban areas, but there was the problem of emergent technical and scientific areas imposing serious burdens on police resources.

The House of Assembly Select Committee Report which was tabled on 21 August 1962 made a number of recommendations. Significantly, these included an increase in authorised strength by 66 and interestingly, the employment of retired and ex-police officers in court duties and at school crossings. These were signs of desperation.

Around the same time, the idea of advertising for



Many British migrants arrived by Lockheed Constellation, which commenced service in 1947

recruits amongst serving police officers in the United Kingdom was born. The advantages were obvious – applicants would already have police experience and as they would already be trained, the Department would benefit by being able to draw from a pool of mature applicants who were already comfortable with the policing culture.

Not a New Idea

The idea may not have been original, but it was an inspired one, and although not without its difficulties, was to see in excess of 100 serving police officers from the United Kingdom absorbed into the Tasmania Police Force over a period of seven years. In fact, during the latter part of the 1960's, around one-tenth of the force were British imports.

As more applicants became available locally, and pass rates climbed, police numbers grew and the need for such a scheme diminished.

The adoption of overseas recruitment exemplifies the vision and leadership of William James Delderfield,

arguably the most innovative police commissioner in the history of Tasmania Police. At the time of his death in 1990, he was described as “an exceptional man who made a major contribution to the Tasmania Police”. In many respects, that was probably an understatement of his significant contribution which spanned almost 13 years, highlighted by advances in communication, housing, education and training and media relations. An effective and visionary leader who commanded great respect, Bill Delderfield literally dragged policing in Tasmania into the modern age, but that is another story.

Other jurisdictions had already discovered the benefits of importing trained police officers from Britain. Queensland Police had prepared pamphlets to distribute overseas during the 1960's, and had instructed the Agent-General in London to seek recruits amongst prospective migrants. Much earlier (from around 1910), Queensland had recruited a growing number of ex-Irish Constabulary, and at one stage it was believed that the Irish constituted the second largest group of police in that state.

South Australia, it appears, had started a little earlier than Tasmania, for in 1959 it was recognised that the Agent-General's staff had been most co-operative in assisting in the recruitment of applicants from England.

In 1970, Victoria Police took the unusual step of

sending their recruiting officer to England on a four-month recruiting campaign. This, however, was not unprecedented, for in the late 1940's the Victorian Agent-General was hired to recruit serving British police, while the Commissioner himself embarked on a personal tour to 'drum up' possible candidates. Although largely successful (the Victoria Police Annual Report for 1947 gave the figure of 150 English police who were expected to arrive in 1948), many resigned after arrival as they could earn more money elsewhere. In 1947 for example, 58 of the total of 129 overseas recruits resigned. By 1953, only one English recruit was accepted.

Probably the earliest example of drawing upon serving policemen overseas, was the importation of what came to be referred to as the 'London Fifty' to police the Victorian goldfields. Led by Inspector Samuel Freeman, these London Metropolitan Foot Police, actually numbering 54, arrived in May 1853. Originally, the plan had been to import 50 armed and mounted members of the Irish Constabulary, but this did not eventuate. If the original plan had been adhered to, the results may have been more than interesting!

The Webbs – the Beginnings

When Brian Webb wrote to Tasmania Police from his home at Bletchley, in Buckinghamshire on 19 October 1962, enquiring about employment, he was told that he came within 'the standard requirement for selection'. However, he would have to be interviewed in Hobart before a final decision would be made. Although accommodation was not provided, Deputy Commissioner Phillip Fletcher assured him that assistance in obtaining suitable living quarters



A recruiting poster of the 1960's



Brian Webb, Bletchley Traffic Group of Buckinghamshire Constabulary, 1961

would be provided. The stage was set for a migration of policemen on a grand scale.

In the case of Brian Webb, then a serving police officer of the Buckinghamshire Constabulary, he would have been happy to find employment in any State, but came to Tasmania because he and his brother received more help and information than from other States. Brian's brother, Bernard had already resigned from Buckinghamshire Constabulary in March 1962, and was working as a salesman. Brian resigned on 15 October 1963 and both arrived by air on a chartered migrant aircraft with their families on Wednesday 16 October. They were met in Hobart by Tasmania Police Public Relations officer Brian Burkett, accompanied by Harold Tinker, President of the British Legion of Ex-Servicemen, who represented their sponsors. On the following day, they were featured in the *Mercury Newspaper* and after completing applications and sitting a modified examination, both were immediately accepted.

Although not a product of any recruiting initiative on the part of Tasmania Police, the Webbs certainly seemed to be the trigger for a movement which was to gain its real momentum later in the decade. Between them, the Webb brothers chalked up almost 50 years of police service.

Not surprisingly, another ex-Buckinghamshire officer, Gordon Rogers, followed, joining Tasmania Police on 8 May 1964. He was to stay only three months. On 4 Jan 1965, Keith Wilby (who had heard of the Webbs' move) joined, and together, these were the only officers of the Buckinghamshire Constabulary to become police officers in Tasmania.

Retired and now living in Hobart, Keith Wilby was to become increasingly dissatisfied with Tasmanian policing and after almost three year's service, he resigned and spent the remainder of his working life nursing at the Royal Hobart Hospital. The reasons for his dissatisfaction are interesting and tell us much about two entirely different attitudes to policing, and touch upon themes which were to be repeated often over the next few years.

Primarily, Keith rued the fact that the beat policeman in Tasmania was actively discouraged from talking to the public. English police officers were schooled and trained to the fundamental principles of Robert Peel's police institution, and the 'Nine Principles of British Policing' embodied the very foundations of effective police service. Keith Wilby, and others who followed after him, uniformly commented on the lack of communication between the Tasmanian police and their public, and decried the fact that police were actively discouraged from talking to people, and he saw this as unproductive and archaic, the opposite in fact to British policing practice. Police, he recalls, were not respected and called 'pigs' rather than the friendly epithets commonly used at home. There was an 'us and them' mentality. A good police force, Keith believed, is going to be close to the populace.

According to Keith, Tasmania was benefiting from the acquisition of serving officers who had been vetted in the United Kingdom, had received over three



months training in Home Office standardised courses and had served two year's probation. However, Keith clearly remembers the resentment amongst some Tasmanian police officers, particularly the 'old school' who understandably felt threatened by the introduction of these experienced newcomers. These feelings increased his resolve to leave the job.

In fairness, it must have been difficult for the newcomers, as it must have been for the Tasmanian police who at times had to suffer the repeated lament that 'this is not how we do things back home'. Most of us today can guess the reply that would have been forthcoming. Like any story, there were two sides to it.

Reasons for Leaving

Conditions in the UK which made overseas service attractive in the 1960s included general discontent with working conditions, complaints against police, increasing problems with racism, and the aftermath of the 1962 Royal Commission on the Police.

The issue of racism was touched upon by many interviewees. Ghettos were beginning to be formed in a number of areas and people were becoming concerned about the future for their families.

Many ex-UK members cited their current working and living environments as the primary reasons for wishing to find a better life elsewhere. They foresaw huge problems arising from the immigration policy in Britain, their wages were low, and no improvement was in sight. Furthermore, a number of county forces, in common with London Metropolitan, required members to live in police premises, even if the member owned a house privately. Such unrealistic requirements were further thorns in the side of the already disgruntled and despairing employees.

Some, like Bernard Mack from Manchester City Police, felt that the long hours expected of them in specialist squads (Bernard worked Murder Squad) were making their lives a misery, lives that were beginning to resemble those of the criminals they sought. Peter Connell, who also came over in 1965 from Nottingham City Police, well remembers the

The Webbs being sworn in on 18 October 1963 – Bernard and Brian Webb, Sgt. Walter Thomas, Terence Shirley (Secretary), William Delderfield

issue surrounding complaints against police. He explained how the public were actively encouraged to complain, and police were instructed to hand out a pamphlet entitled *How to Complain*. Not a wonderful thing for morale! Colin Lewis, ex-Birmingham City reiterated that complaints were both common, and encouraged.

Peter did not endear himself to the OIC Training, Merv Fleming, who met him and Jim Wyton at the airport. His incredulous observation about the tin roofs of the suburbs between the airport and the city drew the sharp rebuke, "Stop knocking the place when you've only been here five minutes". The comment of course was understandable, for in many areas of England, tin roofs were unheard of.

Peter, who was to leave Tasmania Police after almost exactly 10 year's service, was to be a central

figure in the cadet inquiry of 1974 (again, another story). He left Tasmania Police under a cloud, but went on to carve a rewarding career in Federal policing, retiring in May 1985 as Deputy Chief Inspector (Commander, Tasmania District). It was also due largely to Connell's being made up to ex-officio senior constable rank based upon his home service experience, that ex-serving British police were given a service increment (believed to be prior service minus one year). This, in fact, caused a great deal of animosity, particularly towards newcomers.

Bones of Contention

Common gripes centred upon the lack of utilisation of British experience – Wilfred Knight for example had solid detective experience but was never given the opportunity

to work in CIB. George Phillips was a trained dog handler, but his offer to train a dog was ignored. Others included the almost non-existent communications and lack of telephones. Reporting of crime seemed primitive, and there were no unmarked cars.

Probably the one area that drew the most comments was beat policing. Described as archaic, it bore many hallmarks of a Dickensian system. No deviation was allowed from the route, no speaking, and one had to walk on the outside of the footpath. "However," commented Tony Gatward, "there was not really a lot to moan about and it was my own choice after all." Bill Baxter still smarts at the indignity of not being able to go for a pee until he got the sergeant's permission! He clearly recalls being instructed not to talk to members of the public and not to stand with his arms folded. "For God's sake", he commented. "I was 30-years-old, married, ex-police, ex-army, ex-factory!".

Brian Bick, ex-London Metropolitan, recalls the

terrible disenchantment of his lot on the beat. Unlike UK forces, Tasmania Police had to walk a regular beat and to remain in sight at all times, like untrustworthy school-children. The rear of premises and rooftops were not to be checked as they would have been on British beats. Brian and others described beats as often being too short and thoroughly boring. One beat, for example, was the Cat and Fiddle Square – for eight hours! For Brian, the thought of resignation came very close to reality one evening, but the then Sergeant Otley Carr reassured the young constable that this was only a temporary condition.

For most, this advice was accurate and things improved after the next school graduated and they could finally get out of Hobart. In Brian's case, he went on to give Tasmania Police 30 years of his working life. On the other hand, Tony Smith of Birmingham City did succumb, and resigned after less than two year's service. He is still in Hobart and probably still working for Prudential Insurance.

Other newcomers like Hugh Wilson, ex-British Transport Police, Dave Grimsey, ex-Kent County Constabulary, and Bob Palmer, ex-Durham Constabulary, made similar comments about the beat system. They also mentioned the mind-numbing foot-slogging, the antiquated way police were lined up at the start of duty, their accoutrements checked before being marched out of the Headquarters lane-way. Apart from the police whistle, commented Bob Palmer, there was virtually no other form of communication apart from the police telephone box outside the National Bank on the corner of Liverpool and Elizabeth Streets, providing a direct link to headquarters.

In fairness, although the beat system was restrictive, it was this way for safety reasons – the need to know where officers were. Remember, there was no communication link yet (portable radios came around the early 1970's). As Bob Palmer explained, the only contact the beat policeman had was from the sergeant and his car. In reality, you kept an eye on your mate on the adjoining beat.

Not quite Paradise, but not a Bad Deal for a Few Quid

The up-side of the movement of these officers was primarily that they could secure a job and a house for £20. Upon arrival, migrant police were met at the airport and taken to lodgings around Hobart which were paid up for the first seven days, until more permanent accommodation could be found. In this regard, most were assisted by the Department. Apart from some minor hiccups, such as the failure to provide a meal for hungry new arrivals, things generally went smoothly. Basically, there was a job waiting for them provided a medical examination was passed.

Naturally, earlier arrivals tended to assist those coming later, as did the Public Relations Branch, and this eased the shock of 'transportation' for many a British family who were thrown into a strange society with little preparation. What exacerbated this problem was the fact that the man of the family would be off to work almost from day one, while the wife and children would be left to fend for themselves in a totally



Phil Tustian, Liverpool City Police College, 1964

alien environment. Hence, the support given by fellow newcomers was a valuable lifeline.

It was generally agreed that many stations were better than their UK counterparts. There was a solid sense of camaraderie, the rank distinction was not as great, and the welfare system was very strong. Leave entitlements, for example were significantly greater. Explaining how a constable back home would be often referred to by his number, Tony Gatward found it a distinct pleasure to be called 'Mr Gatward'.

Charlie Smith marveled at the luxury of being able to drive around in a police vehicle with only 25,000 miles on the clock (the last vehicle he drove in Hertfordshire showed 104,000), and many commented on the fact that one could drive a police vehicle at all, so soon after arrival.

Tony Roberts was amazed at the ready availability of back-up for a place as small as Hobart (many of these officers worked in counties with far greater populations than Tasmania itself). He commented on the number of vehicles as well as the ease of getting duty in a motor vehicle, while Bob Palmer added that policing in Tasmania was a more casual affair - he even went as far as adding that at times it could actually be boring. Durham, by comparison, was flat-out all the time. This more friendly and less regimented police society was no doubt a refreshing change for many of the British migrants.

The Last Two

Philip William Tustian, ex-Bedfordshire County, started with Tasmania Police on 27 January 1970. He grew up in rural Oxfordshire (70 miles north-west of London) as one of 14 children on a farm, and was appointed as a police cadet at 16. At age 19 he was appointed constable and was soon serving in Bedford, a town of around 80,000 with a big immigrant population, a mixture of Italian, Pakistani, Indian, West Indian, a few 'white' Russians and other assorted races. He worked mainly driving Panda Cars on one-man beats. Corresponding with a mate, Keith Dunbar, who had emigrated, gave Phil the idea to travel, and after all, if he didn't like it, he could return after two years on the cheap. Before long he was training in Sackville Street on Course 64, half of whom were 'Poms'.

As many would be aware, Phil has a farm at Natone, and has been at Burnie now for 27 years, a sergeant for 22 of them. He is 55-years-old.

John Malcolm Blue was born in East Ham and joined London Metropolitan Police aged 22 as a trainee constable, first serving at Barking (Essex). John was working as a detective in London immediately prior to joining Tasmania Police on 17 August 1970. Basically, he left England with the positive aim of finding a better environment in which to bring up his family. He was also becoming a little fed-up with the 'old school tie' society. Not really minding which part of the Commonwealth he migrated to, John was attracted to the Tasmanian offer of a guaranteed job on arrival. Like others, he found that to mention the words 'back home' was like waving a red rag before a bull, although his English detective training notes were keenly sought after! John lives and works

in Hobart, where he has served 30 years of his police career. He is 58-years-old, and has been an inspector for just over 10 years.

So, the end of an era is well and truly nigh, and who knows, Norm Wood's record may yet be overtaken. The period of the migration of these serving British police officers during the 1960's and into the very early 1970's is a fascinating one, and each has a tale to tell that is worthy of a story in its own right. For these individual officers, the migration was nothing less than a huge undertaking and one that would change their lives forever. For Tasmania Police, it was the answer to a prayer, for not only did it provide much needed manpower, it provided trained and experienced manpower, albeit with an accent.

I would like to thank the large number of ex-British police who took time out to speak with me, not only in Tasmania, but interstate. Your willingness to be pinned down in your retirement, 'interrogated', and to give me your frank and honest opinions has been appreciated more than you can possibly imagine. Thank you too to those who entrusted me with personal photographs.

My thanks too to Henry Osuchowski for his untiring assistance in verifying details after I had discovered that upon joining, new members' fingerprint cards were endorsed on the reverse with the force of origin, if applicable.

I would also like to say thank you to Richard Cardiff and his staff in Records for their unstinting help in my protracted search for details.

Lastly, a special thank you to Brian Bick. Because he was English, and because he was often within my reach, he became a sounding board for many of my thoughts and questions.

In the next issue of the Journal, I will publish a complete tabulation of those policemen who migrated, giving their forces of origin, their dates of service, and the total time served. I know many of you will draw some interest from this and hopefully be reminded of some of those characters that came from 'the other side'.



John Blue, London Metropolitan Police 1967 – note the 'on-duty' sleeve band