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Introduction: Themes, Sources and Context

WE LIVE – AND have lived for more than a century – in a policed society. We may be critical of the ways in which policing is organised and carried out but few would argue that we should not have uniformed, bureaucratically organized and accountable police forces. Yet (in historical terms) it is not that long ago that the introduction of such forces, the so-called 'new police', that replaced an older system based on parochial constables and night watchmen, was highly controversial. In the last fifty years police history has been a dynamic part of both academic and popular history. We now know so much more about the development of the 'new police' that few, if any, would subscribe to the comforting, 'Whiggish' narratives of the earliest police historians, such as Captain W L Melville Lee and Charles Reith.[1] But if we are all 'revisionists' now, there is considerable scope for disagreement, not least over the nature and extent of 'policing by consent', that supposedly distinctive feature of British policing. Further, despite the upsurge in publications our knowledge of the development of policing remains patchy, particularly in geographical terms. A considerable amount of attention has been devoted to the history of the police in London and the major cities but, with a few honourable exceptions, we know little about the policing of medium-sized towns and the counties. Given the importance of the West Riding to the socio-economic and political development of the country in the nineteenth century, it is surprising that so little research has been done on an area noted for its economic dynamism, social tensions and political agitation. This book goes some way to filling that gap by focussing on the

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advent of the 'new police' in Huddersfield and the Huddersfield district (that is, Upper Agbrigg) in the period c.1840 to 1868, which constituted the first generation of 'new policing' in the district. 1840 was a crucial year. The local magistrates had to decide whether or not to implement the recently-passed Rural Police Act. For reasons that will be discussed later, magistrates from urban and rural areas voted not to do so. So too, though coincidentally, was 1848. It was the year that saw the passing of the second Huddersfield Improvement Act, which paved the way for the creation of a 'new police' force in the town, and also saw the appointment of a superintending constable for the Huddersfield district, which led to an attempt to modernise parochial policing. 1868 is more of an arbitrary date but the incorporation of Huddersfield in that year had a significant impact on local policing. The town boundaries were extended, and the police force greatly enlarged, while there was a corresponding diminution in the Upper Agbrigg division of the West Riding County Constabulary (WRCC).

Association of British Counties Map of Yorkshire. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 UK: England and Wales License.

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Themes

There are three distinct strands to this book. The first is essentially institutional. Chapters two, three and eight consider in detail the way in which the 'new police' forces were created through an examination of the characteristics of the men who were recruited, their career outcomes and the developing structure of the forces as a whole. Although important in their own right, particularly chapter three which considers the fraught relationship between the Huddersfield Improvement Commissioners and successive superintendents of police, these chapters provide a framework for a broader social history of policing. This is the second strand, covered in chapters four, five, seven and eight, which consider the nature of police work and the experiences of policemen as individuals rather than as part of an overall statistical aggregate. The third strand comprises a social history of the district through the prism of policing. Chapters six, nine and ten focus on the communities and individuals who came into direct contact with the police on a day-to-day basis. The book falls into two distinct but complementary sections which approach the subject selectively. The beerhouse-brothels that figure so large in the discussion of Huddersfield do not appear in the consideration of Upper Agbrigg but this is not to suggest that the problem did not exist outside the town. Similarly, 'cruel' sports were not found solely in the countryside. Dogfights, for example, took place in Huddersfield as late as the 1860s. In both cases, repetition would not have added substantially to the overall arguments of the book. Likewise, embezzlement was a problem in Huddersfield but because less has been written about its rural manifestations it is discussed in detail only in part two. Even within the parameters of a local study certain topics have been omitted. Major offences, particularly the more spectacular and violent crimes, are touched on but briefly because they were few and far between and distract from the more mundane realities of crime and policing. There is, however, one omission that requires further explanation. The Huddersfield borough force was not unique in providing a fire-fighting capability. This had resource implications, even though the police fire brigade was but one of a number in the town. The provision of fire-fighting facilities in general was of considerable importance and deserves treatment in its own right. Policemen as firefighters are touched on briefly, not because their role was unimportant but because their role in Huddersfield needs fuller treatment at a later date.

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There is an over-arching question that links the three strands – the notion, and more importantly, the realities of 'policing by consent' in the first generation of 'new policing', which is fully discussed in chapter eleven. The issues thus raised are central to much recent debate on the development of Victorian Britain but this is an unashamedly 'bottom-up' and local – but not parochial – study. By focussing on a relatively small geographical area (as well as a relatively brief time span), it is possible to tease out the complexities and contradictions in the development of 'new policing' that are necessarily lost in more general accounts. While it is important at times to generalise about regions and nations, it is equally important to ensure that such generalisations are based on an appropriate range of experiences and take into account particularities that are at the heart of the developing relationship between police and policed in these critical years. This is not to imply that the Huddersfield district is a microcosm of the country at large. While it is likely that the Huddersfield experience was not dissimilar from that of other medium-sized textile towns in the West Riding of Yorkshire and in south Lancashire, the emphasis here is on the distinctiveness of local circumstances and individuals and provides another building block from which broader conclusions can be drawn.

Sources

All histories are constrained by the availability and imperfections of source material and the reader needs to be aware of the problems associated with the primary sources that have been utilised. The minutes of the Huddersfield Improvement Commissioners and of their Watch Committee have been used extensively to create a picture of the emergence and development of the borough force between 1848 and 1868. They contain a wealth of valuable detail but there are important limitations. The commissioners did not think it appropriate or necessary to record the age, marital status and previous occupations of recruits to the force, nor did they systematically record the reasons for which men were dismissed. Occasionally, they tell why men resigned and the positions to which they moved but more often they do not. Discussions, at various levels, are recorded, sometimes in considerable detail, other times not. Indeed, some key events were not recorded at all even though other sources indicate that they were discussed. In contrast, the police registers of the WRCC contain considerable

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biographical details of the men who joined the force but they need to be treated with care. Place of birth, for example, is not the same as place of habitation at the time of joining. Similarly, the evidence of occupation can be misleading. No-one who served in the Upper Agbrigg division of the WRCC gave his occupation as 'policeman', even though several had been serving policemen when they applied to join the WRCC. The information on disciplinary records is patchy, in some cases giving reasons for dismissals in others not. There is also the vexed question of the honesty of the individuals. Edward Antrobus, who will figure large in the Honley riot of 1862, lied about his previous police experience and his official record is, quite simply, incorrect. Only later did the truth emerge and even then the police register was not amended. It is impossible to say how many other men were dishonest. Census material has been used to supplement information on individual officers. The general problems associated with the use of census enumerators' books are well known.[2] More specifically, many men served for only a brief period of time between censuses. Trying to identify which Joseph Baxter, for example, served as a policeman for three months in 1863 was highly time-consuming and ultimately fruitless. The most important source for this study has been the local and, to a lesser extent, the regional press. Again, the problems associated with such sources are well known. Two points deserve emphasis. First, coverage was selective as editors looked to circulation figures. The dramatic or the grotesque made good copy, the routine did not. Second, events were not reported objectively. Newspapers had overt political stances – the *Huddersfield Chronicle* was a conservative paper, the *Huddersfield Examiner* liberal – which influenced their coverage, including editorialising, on key events, such as the 1856 County and Borough Police Act. More subtly, the press reflected, often unconsciously and to varying degrees, prevailing assumptions about working-class men and women and the causes of criminality. While it is easier to determine what contemporaries believed to be the case, establishing the underlying 'realities' is more difficult not least because the voices of key players were not just distorted but often simply unheard. The voice of ordinary policemen is seldom heard. The evidence they gave in court was largely formulaic and gave little indication of their thinking about the job. There is virtually no direct evidence on why men joined the borough or county forces, what they thought of the job and why they left. There are also problems identifying the people who appeared in court. There are no surviving

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petty sessional records for these years. Furthermore, the individuals concerned rarely speak directly in the historical record. There are no memoirs or letters to explain their behaviour. In so far as they are heard, it is through the reports of their cases as they sought (in most cases) to exculpate themselves. Their words, when reported directly, were bowdlerised and regularised; often they were parodied. Even if they had been reported accurately, their words often reflected what they thought the magistrates wished to hear – that the offence was committed when the accused was "fresh" or "beerified" – rather than what they actually thought. Nonetheless, often through the unwitting testimony of the evidence, it is possible to piece together partial life-histories that help us understand the wider socio-economic context in which crimes were committed. The problems of source material are considerable and have to be confronted. There are times when the evidence seems akin to the images from a fairground hall of mirrors with some features grossly exaggerated, others diminished, some figures given exaggerated prominence and others glimpsed at the margins, if at all. Nonetheless, a picture can be constructed that is not simply caricature and this will be presented in the following pages. But, reader beware! Authorial confidence has to be judged in light of the frailties of the material from which the story has been constructed.

The central aim in writing this book has been to produce a thoroughly-researched but accessible account of critical developments –the advent of and response to the 'new police' – during an important period of time, the 'golden' years of Victorian Britain. So as not to disrupt the flow of the narrative, details of certain historiographical and methodological issues have been confined to the footnotes where full references are given. Finally, many of the issues discussed – the responsibilities and tactics of the police, the role of the law in criminalizing certain activities and the impact of wider socio-economic inequalities on both crime and policing – are not historical curiosities that can be safely labelled and put away like museum pieces but remain as relevant today as they were 150 years ago.

Context

Before moving to the main story, it is necessary to sketch in key aspects of the socio-economic context in which policing took place in Huddersfield and district in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. In 1837 White's *Directory* described Huddersfield as 'a

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populous, flourishing and handsome market town', a far cry from the early nineteenth century when it comprised an 'insignificant cluster of irregularly built lanes … [with] houses poor and scattered, the streets narrow, crooked and dirty.'[3] The growth of the fancy woollens trade* in the second quarter of the nineteenth century gave rise to an upsurge of new mill building, unmatched elsewhere in the West Riding. In 1851 the population of the township had risen to c.31,000 and reached c.70,000 by 1871. In 1851 roughly 80 per cent of the town's population lived within the limits of the improvement act, though this figure fell over the next twenty years. Since the 1820s there was a growing number of Irish people, living across the town but most particularly in and around Castlegate and Upperhead Row. Over the course of the 1850s and 1860s outlying villages, such as Lindley, Moldgreen and Paddock were gradually incorporated, both socially and economically, into Huddersfield. Incorporation gave formal recognition to this process of change. As in many other towns and cities, the middle classes moved away from the town centre, no longer wishing to live over their businesses. Huddersfield in 1871 was more socially segregated than in 1851 as the elites moved to Edgerton and Greenhead, the respectable lower middle classes to Primrose Hill and the Thornhill estate in Hillhouse and the respectable working classes to Rashcliffe and parts of Moldgreen.[4] The very poor, including many Irish, were confined to the courts and cellars in town but there remained large numbers of people still living in socially diverse districts in which relative prosperity and poverty coexisted cheek-by-jowl. Such changes increasingly led to the labelling of certain parts of the town as problematic, which in turn brought them more attention from the police and other authorities. Overall, Huddersfield was considered 'one of the prettiest and cleanest towns in the West Riding' and in comparisons with other industrial towns in the West Riding was relatively healthy. In the early 1840s the town's death rate was 18 per 1,000 compared to a West Riding average of 21. However, by the late 1860s, although still below the regional average, the death

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* Fancy weaving, involving the use of various yarns – woollen, worsted, cotton and silk – to produce patterned cloths, was a feature of the Huddersfield district that can be traced back to the 1790s. Fancy waistcoats were a particular speciality. The third quarter of the nineteenth century saw the growth of the related novelty trade in which rabbit fur, feathers and even dog-hairs were incorporated into the cloth.

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rate had increased by a third to 24 per 1,000.[5] The town had a problem with overcrowding in poorly built houses with limited access to water and even fewer sanitary provisions, and suffered periodic outbreaks of typhus, typhoid, diarrhoea and dysentery as well as influenza and even cholera. These problems were most acute in the closely-packed, poor working-class districts. 'Hell's Square' at the junction of Upperhead Row and Westgate was notorious for its recurrent outbreaks of epidemic disease.[6] Furthermore, physical squalor and moral decay were seen to go together.

Nonetheless, the town was seen to be prosperous in the third-quarter of the nineteenth century and its prosperity was firmly rooted in the burgeoning textile trades. The Great Exhibition of 1851 confirmed Huddersfield's standing as a major textiles centre. Six firms were awarded prize medals, including Armitage Brothers 'for excellence of manufacture, combined with economy' and J & T C Wrigley & Co. 'for general excellence of manufacture and ingenuity in new application of materials.'[7] In the mid-nineteenth century approximately 5,000 men and women (equivalent to 15 per cent of the population) were employed in the textile industries. The woollen trades predominated but cotton and silk became relatively more important in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. A number of factors contributed to this success: the continued growth of the fancy trade, notably the novelty trade; the development of the tweed trade; the introduction and improvement of the power loom; improved transport links (especially after the coming of the railway in 1848) and finally buoyant markets at home and abroad. Importantly, there was no dramatic or wholesale change from the old domestic production to the 'modern' integrated factory. Old and new coexisted. Handloom weavers – always the most vulnerable members of the textile fraternity – were an important element of the workforce in the 1860s even as factories and power looms became more common. There was never a repeat of the severe trade depression of 1837–43 but local trades, especially those dependent on exports, were subject to cyclical fluctuations that could throw once comfortably-off families into poverty as happened in 1865. There were also the unpredictable, random shocks – such as the Cotton Famine brought on by the American civil war – that could have dramatic social effects and important consequences in terms of criminal behaviour.

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There was more to Huddersfield's success than spinning yarn and weaving cloth. Around these core industries developed a number of ancillary trades from dyeing to packaging and the demand generated had a knock-on effect that benefitted the town's growing 'shopocracy'. It is easy to understate the diversity of the local economy. There were butchers, bakers and tea-dealers; drapers, furriers, milliners and boot-makers; joiners, plumbers and painters; even an umbrella maker and a manufacturer of artificial legs, arms, hands and spring trusses! But there were also a large number of itinerant hawkers, peddlers, rag-and-bone men (and women) as well as unskilled labourers. In good times such people barely scraped a living; in bad times they struggled. Theirs was a 'makeshift economy' which comprised often intermittent, poorly-paid work, dependence upon charity or poor relief and recourse to crime. There were considerable inequalities in wealth (and its consequences in terms of ill-health and reduced life expectancy) and limited support for the losers in the economic life of the time. Mid-Victorian Huddersfield was more prosperous than ever before and the third-quarter of the nineteenth century saw striking improvement in the economic and social well-being of the town *in general terms*. But improvements in overall *per capita* income masked considerable variations. The town acquired yet more signifiers of progress and civilization – its Chamber of Commerce, its Philosophical Hall, its Collegiate Institute and its Literary & Scientific Society – but behind this facade there was an underside of insecurity, poverty and ill-health; of immorality and criminality that posed grave problems for the town's political elite. Indeed, as the march of civilization proceeded apace, so too did expectations of order and decorum, especially in public places. What might have been tolerated in the 1820s and 1830s was no longer acceptable in the 1850s and 1860s and the police had a central role to play, not just in fighting crime but in upholding new standards of behaviour.

Upper Agbrigg had its distinctive characteristics which gave rise to particular problems for the police. There was a sharp contrast between the compact geographical entity that was Huddersfield and the sprawling district that was Upper Agbrigg. Set in a diverse and dynamic region (the West Riding of Yorkshire) that played a critical part in the industrialisation of Britain, the district covered an area of almost 86,000 acres, including some bleak and inhospitable Pennine moorland, and contained a population of over 100,000. There were

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numerous villages and hamlets as well as some fourteen semi-industrial townships, varying in size from less than 2,000 people to over 10,000, to be found in the valleys of the Colne and the Holme rivers.[8] Old and new practices coexisted. Handloom weaving persisted in several villages (for example Kirkburton, Kirkheaton and Skelmanthorpe) while modern mills sprang up in others (such as Marsden and Meltham). Some communities (notably Golcar and Lockwood) prospered and grew as the result of modernization – the introduction of power looms – and proximity to Huddersfield while others (particularly Honley and Holmfirth) saw stagnation or decline. Social tensions created by economic change posed problems of order but they were compounded by a tradition of political radicalism and popular dissent, which manifested itself most notably in the Anti-Poor Law and Chartist movements of the 1830s and 1840s, which gave rise to fears that 'a vast number of the working classes … are constantly aiming at the subversion of all social order'.[9] It also contributed to an ideological framework whereby police conduct was evaluated.

Some of the greatest problems stemmed from the geography of the region. The population was scattered and often in relatively inaccessible areas some distance from Huddersfield, where the office of the superintending constable (later district superintendent of police) was located. This was particularly true of places such as Marsden, Meltham, Holme, Saddleworth and Scammonden, seven or more miles from Huddersfield, located in the difficult to access hills of the Pennines. Much of the district around Marsden was 'uncultivated moorland'; the village of Holme was part of 'a mountainous moorland township'; and Scammonden was a 'wild and mountainous township'. Several of the villages closer to Huddersfield, such as Scholes and Shelley, were 'straggling' and 'scattered' while in the relatively compact village of Honley there were numerous small-scale (and independently-minded) landowners and artisans, who kept alive a radical tradition. Other townships, such as Holmfirth and Kirkheaton, had a reputation for lawlessness, especially cockfighting and brawling. However, proximity to Huddersfield did not guarantee an easier life for the police with upsurges of hostility towards them in adjacent villages such as Lindley, Birkby and Fartown. It was against this complex and evolving socio-economic and political background in which the superintending constable system and later the WRCC had to operate.

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Endnotes

1 W L Melville Lee, *A History of Police in England*, London, Methuen, 1901 and C Reith, *A Short History of the British Police*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1948.

2 For an introduction see E Higgs, *A Clearer Sense of the Census*, London, HMSO, 1996.

3 G Phillips, 'Walks Around Huddersfield. No.1', *Bradford Observer*, [hereafter *B.Obs*], 2 September 1847.

4 There was also movement of the very poor, notably the 'low Irish' driven out to Johnny Moore's Hill, Paddock which was beyond the jurisdiction of the Improvement Commissioners. This section draws heavily on R Dennis, 'The Social geography of Victorian Huddersfield' in Hilary Haigh, ed., *Huddersfield: A Most Handsome Town*, Huddersfield, Kirklees Cultural Services, 1992, pp.423–48.

5 For further details, see H Marland, *Medicine and society in Wakefield and Huddersfield, 1780–1870*, Cambridge, Cambridge University press, 1987, esp. chapter two, section 3, pp.34–44.

6 *Ibid*, p.36. For continuing problems of insanitation, especially in unregulated lodging houses see *Huddersfield Chronicle,* [hereafter *HC*], 4 March 1865, 7 July, 1 & 8 September and 8 December 1866.

7 W B Crump & G Ghorbal, *History of the Huddersfield Woollen Industry*, Huddersfield, 1935, reprinted 1967, p.132.

8 D T Jenkins, 'Textiles and other industries, 1815–1914' in Haigh, *Huddersfield,* pp.241–74.

9 Captain Fenton to General Bouverie, 29 December 1832 quoted in J Hargreaves, '"A Metropolis of Discontent": Popular Protest in Huddersfield, c.1780–c.1850' in Haigh, *Huddersfield*, pp.208-9. See also N Pye, *The Home Office and the Chartists: Protest and Repression in the West Riding of Yorkshire*, Pontypool, Merlin, 2013.