

Trouble in Honley and Holmfirth

THE INTRODUCTION OF the WRCC into the Upper Agbrigg district had been achieved with some difficulty but, after five years, there were encouraging signs that suggested that a *modus vivendi* was being established between the new police and the bulk of the population. Indeed, when, between the 24th of June and the 9th of July 1862, the men of the WRCC were inspected, it was the judgement of Lt. Col. J. Woodford, Her Majesty's Inspector for the Northern District, and formerly Chief Constable of the Lancashire County Constabulary, that they had 'been maintained in a highly satisfactory state of discipline and efficiency'.¹ Regarding Upper Agbrigg, he was 'satisfied with the state of the men, books and cells, everything being regular and satisfactory'.² Such positive and reassuring statements must have appeared very strange to many local people as the police inspection coincided, almost exactly, with two major demonstrations of anti-police sentiment in Honley and Holmfirth, which revealed a widespread antipathy towards the police and certain police methods and cast important light on problems facing the 'new' police in the 1860s.

On the 28th of June 1862 the *Leeds Mercury* carried a report under the eye-catching by-line: 'Desperate Attack On The Police By A Mob Near Huddersfield'. The riot came out of the blue and was avidly covered by the local and regional press and even gained mention in the national press.³ The arrival of the 'new' police in Honley had been largely uncontroversial but matters changed with the transfer of PC Edward Antrobus to the village. Little is known of Antrobus's earlier career. His entry in the WRCC archive is sparse. Born in Stockport around 1830, he was appointed in February

1861, transferred to Upper Agbrigg in March 1861 and transferred out four months later, before being dismissed in October 1863 for unspecified reasons.⁴ The local press is more informative. Antrobus's actions were first noted in April 1861, when he was faced with an angry crowd of thirty to forty people outside the *Butcher's Arms* in Deighton.⁵ The significance of the event, apparent in hindsight, was less clear at the time as Deighton had a reputation as a trouble spot, where parish constables, as well as the new police, were periodically subject to attack. However, the fact that Antrobus was transferred out of Deighton suggests that the police authorities had reservations about his behaviour. He was next stationed in the small village of Farnley Tyas but a mere three weeks later was moved again, this time to Honley, where his career was nothing if not spectacular. In just over a year he was responsible for more prosecutions than had been brought by all constables in the village in the four years since the formation of the WRCC. He pursued his cases with zeal and pressed for heavy charges against men (mostly) and women, who were not well-paid as agricultural labourers or factory workers. Some of the most contentious cases involved public houses, beerhouses and the enforcement of the licensing laws. In October 1861 he brought a prosecution against a local landlord and his customers for the illegal sale of alcohol at the Honley Feast, only for the magistrates to throw it out on the grounds that the men involved were *bona fide* travellers and, as such, there had been no infringement of the law. Before the end of the year he was the alleged victim in three assault cases, two in Honley and one in Thurstonland. On at least one occasion, his evidence was flatly contradicted by witnesses who declared Antrobus to be the aggressor.⁶ In January 1862 Antrobus brought another assault charge but was accused of throwing a man to the floor and attempting to throttle him.⁷ Although the significance of the event was not obvious at the time, he also brought an unsuccessful assault charge against well-known local character, Johnny Moss. His activities did not abate. In the spring of 1862 Antrobus brought another charge of illegal Sunday drinking (this time involving a landlord and his customers, two churchwardens and a parish constable, in nearby Netherton) only for it to be thrown out by the magistrates. Finally, in the same month (May) he was involved in yet another fracas in the *George and Dragon*, Honley, in which he was accused of hitting a woman.⁸ In addition, on numerous occasions Antrobus charged people with obstructing footpaths or highways; and when he was

not bringing prosecutions he made frequent use of the now well-established 'move on' tactic.⁹ 'Moving on' was always fraught with tension, even when implemented with moderation but when it was not (as in Honley), as one local writer noted, it was

exceedingly galling in a manufacturing district, where the operatives are immured in factories during the day; and they surely should not, if, after work hours, they meet together to breathe the free air and exchange thoughts with each other, be taken 'for obstructing the road'.¹⁰

Such was Antrobus' zeal to ensure the free movement of pedestrians and vehicular traffic through Honley that he did not confine his activities to groups of twenty or thirty, which might reasonably have been seen as a potential obstruction, but to groups of two or three. Infringing 'a working man's privilege to saunter through the streets and lanes of our populous villages of the evening' was bad enough but, to make matters worse, the village was hardly a hot-bed of disorder. As the *Examiner* tartly observed: 'Town Gate Honley is not New Street Huddersfield'.¹¹

Matters came to a head on Monday the 23rd of June when simmering ill-feeling 'found vent'.¹² Antrobus was on duty between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. and was attempting to 'move on' three 'respectable' inhabitants of the village when Johnny Moss came up and checked the constable, calling out 'Come up, Antrobus! Roll up, Antrobus!' which was 'part of a pre-concerted signal to gather the rowdy populace'.¹³ Moss was 'aided by a bell, a mule and a cart, together with a troupe of youngsters with penny whistles'.¹⁴ A crowd of some 200 quickly gathered and the hostility towards Antrobus became more apparent. Surrounded by a 'mob' in Towngate, he was offered a drink by James Coldwell, one of the accused at the subsequent trial, who, coming from Dobson's beer house with a glass of ale in his hand, allegedly said: 'Here, sup old bugger; thou hasn't long to stop here; we'll warm thee before the neet's out'.¹⁵ A crowd, by now as many as 300, ran Antrobus from the village, stoning him, knocking him senseless, albeit momentarily and, as 'the crowd disported around him', it was alleged, someone shouted: 'Give him more; kill the ----; he's only acting'.¹⁶ Antrobus was able (or allowed) to escape over the fields and reach the safety of the house of the district police sergeant (Turner) who also lived in Honley. At 10 p.m. that evening, in the company of two other officers, he returned to find two fires

blazing. One was at a bridge close to the village but the other was at his house. A crowd, now estimated at 400, fired the cottage and burnt in effigy both Antrobus and his wife. The stoning resumed and Antrobus was forced to flee to the main Honley/Holmfirth road where he found refuge, somewhat ironically, in an inn. The crowd surrounded *Jacob's Well*, threatening to burn it down. Some remained there, keeping Antrobus trapped until midnight; others returned to his cottage, broke its windows with stones and even threw 'burning straw besmeared with tar' at Mrs Antrobus.¹⁷ No arrests were made that night but the police returned the following day with warrants for the (alleged) ring leaders. Six of the ten men who had been charged were arrested; an attempted mass rescue of the prisoners failed and the men were taken in handcuffs to the cells in Huddersfield. The anti-police rioting died down but a local defence committee was established to raise funds for the forthcoming trial; money flowed in from all quarters. Such was the ill-feeling towards Antrobus that 'many of the most respectable inhabitants ... subscribed liberally to the defence [fund]'.¹⁸

The composition of the defence committee cannot be determined but, Honley's radical tradition and earlier links with the Chartist movement might well explain the decision to seek the help of the well-known radical lawyer, 'Mr Roberts of Manchester' who was contacted to represent the arrested men. 'Mr Roberts' was the former Chartist and prominent radical lawyer William Prowting Roberts, widely known as the 'miners' attorney-general'.¹⁹ Roberts had appeared for the defence in a number of industrial cases in the West Riding, not least the trial of men involved in the Thongsbridge Weavers' strike of 1860.²⁰ However, of greater relevance was Roberts's attitude towards the 'new police' and his involvement in cases relating to them. He had referred to the 'new police' as 'a plague of blue locusts' and created a stir when, in a case in Manchester, he was reported to have recommended 'the knocking down of a policeman if he interfered with innocent people'.²¹ Roberts had appeared in a number of local cases involving the 'new police' and their forerunners. In May 1850 he crossed swords with Superintendent Heaton, who was seeking to restrict the opening hours of beerhouse keepers in Holmfirth and, almost a year later in April 1851, he appeared at a special session in the Guildhall, Huddersfield, representing those who objected to the continuation of a paid constable in nearby Kirkburton.²² In late 1859 he represented

a miner accused of assaulting a police constable during the Silkstone Colliery strike, but his most relevant and most recent involvement was in a case of alleged police brutality in Slaithwaite in 1860. In an eloquent defence, Roberts had highlighted the humiliating practice of parading handcuffed prisoners through the streets and the existence of a 'damp and loathsome [police] cellar' in which his client had been held overnight. He also castigated Heaton for failing to censure the police constable involved. Roberts, quite simply, was the obvious man to defend the Honley rioters.

In total thirty-four men were brought to trial – ten in the first trial, twenty-four in the second. Of these twenty-four have been positively identified in the 1861 census.²³ The oldest was over seventy but a third were under twenty years old and a further third aged between twenty and twenty-nine. 46 per cent of those positively identified were unmarried. Three-quarters of the remainder were family men. At least 54 per cent were employed in the woollen trades, though a quarter were labourers. Of the remainder there were two mechanics, a cordwainer, a butcher and the colourful figure of the hawkler, Johnny Moss, who had been at the centre of the initial disturbance.

The arrested men appeared before magistrates at Huddersfield on the 28th of June. In a 'densely packed' court, the alleged ringleaders heard a prosecution case alleging 'wanton outrage', 'a determined spirit of rebellion and revolt against the authority and control of the police' and pressing the magistrates to agree to the serious charge of riot.²⁴ Roberts stressed that the accused were 'all decent respectable men' and laid great emphasis on the class bias of the police, specifically Antrobus, who 'had exercised a degree of surveillance, cruelty and tyranny towards them [the accused] which he would not have exercised towards gentlemen'.²⁵ There was, as Roberts argued, a pettiness about the police, prodding children with their sticks, but it was the combination of unwarranted use of 'moving on' and arrest practices that led to people being 'handcuffed and treated with every degradation which police malignity could invent' which resulted in a system of 'cruelty to the working classes ... [and] servility to the rich'. The riot was 'the unfortunate result of a perfectly legal resistance' to the excessive and illegal behaviour of the police. Roberts sought to generalise his critique. He stressed the specific shortcomings of Antrobus but he represented him as part of a wider police system that was presided over by the 'large swelling pomposity of Mr.

Superintendent Heaton' – a comment that provoked loud laughter in the courtroom.²⁶ He was also aware of magisterial concern with unacceptable actions by the county police (most recently in the Slaithwaite case) and appealed to their paternalistic instincts: 'the people of Honley ... [he asserted] relied on the magistrates to protect them from Mr. Heaton and his myrmidons'.²⁷

Roberts' speech was typically flamboyant but it would be misleading to dismiss it as rhetorical excess. His comments and questions struck a chord among the men and women of Honley who packed the court. Their responses provide an insight into the animosity towards Antrobus, whose evidence could not have been better calculated to inflame local feelings. Under questioning by Roberts, Antrobus openly admitted that 'he had brought more cases before the magistrates than any of his predecessors' and scarcely helped his case by claiming he was 'not aware that any complaints had been made against him from Honley'. Worse, he asserted that he never 'moved on' groups of two or three people, a response that created 'a sensation among the crowd' in the court. Similarly, his claim that the heavy fines (of £1 and even £3) that he had sought had not created any 'distress' because 'they could get drunk five or six times a week' was not well received.²⁸ Police actions had 'outraged public opinion' which enabled Roberts to make a telling point about their mean-spiritedness. He told the court that he struggled

to characterise their conduct. Tyranny was too strong a word; but they evinced a spirit of interruption, a dislike of seeing people happy, a sort of envy and jealousy which led them to construe a race, a game of cricket, or any other form of amusement into an obstruction of the highway.²⁹

The magistrates were not persuaded by the prosecution argument that the events constituted a riot and as such, triable in a higher court and carrying a higher penalty. The case was treated as a common assault and relatively lenient punishments in the form of fines ranging from £1 to 5s (25p) were handed down. The decision was well received by those in court and, when the prosecution counsel responded to the punishment with the hyperbolic claim that he would 'recommend the chief constable to let his men be killed off as fast as the mob could kill them', he was greeted with hoots of derision.³⁰ Although the magistrates had not explicitly accepted Robert's argument that poverty was being penalized, their decision

to treat the case as one of common assault and the levels of fines that they imposed showed they had little sympathy with the actions of Antrobus and those like him.

Unfortunately, for the police at least, this was not the end of the matter. Tension increased as news spread that ‘between twenty and thirty fresh summonses were being distributed in the village’ and the defence committee was ‘promptly reorganised’ in response to the ‘uncalled for intrusion upon the domestic quiet of so large a number of families upon such trifling pretences’.³¹ Furthermore, this decision meant ‘we are no longer dealing with Police-constable *Antrobus* but with Superintendent *Heaton*’ who had replaced Antrobus at the centre of the stage. The *Examiner* was unequivocal in its condemnation of the ‘vindictiveness...of his actions’ and arguing that

had it been Mr Heaton’s intention to have proved the truth of the charges brought against the police generally ... that of “cruelty to the poor” he could not certainly have accomplished this more effectually than by taking the course he so unwisely adopted.³²

Twenty-four more Honley men, charged with aiding and abetting the convicted ‘ringleaders’, were brought to court and the impact was, if anything, more sensational. Honley came to a halt. ‘Work seemed to be suspended by common consent and groups of people stood at the street corners, talking over the events of the day in an excited manner’.³³ The trial started with a revelation about the strength and breadth of popular sentiment. Then, to the amazement of many in court, the trial was brought to a halt. Following discussions and agreement between the magistrates and the two counsels, Mr Learoyd, the prosecutor, explained that

he had come to the conclusion to recommend the withdrawal of the charges against the defendants on the ground that such a course would serve more than any other to promote the restoration of kindly feeling in the village of Honley.³⁴

The magistrates issued a statement that stressed their duty to both the police and the people but made clear that ‘if a policeman exceeds his duty the Bench, *as in many previous cases*, would discountenance his proceedings’. Furthermore, through Learoyd, Heaton made it known that he had ‘no desire to sanction in the officers any excess of duty on their part’.³⁵ The matter appeared to be over. The response in the village was unequivocal: ‘Honley was “all alive” with such a

display of popular feeling as, perhaps, never before manifested in a country village'.³⁶

And it might have ended there had not Heaton, reportedly 'discouraged' by the magistrates' decision to call off the second trial, come to the decision – politely described at the time as 'very indiscreet' – to prosecute twenty-four boys, aged between ten and twelve, for their part in the riot 'for no other ostensible fault than playing their tin whistles &c at the riot'.³⁷ The impact in Honley was dramatic. The police decision was seen as vindictive and 'aroused public sympathy for the boys' and, according to the *Chronicle* 'did not abate the strong feeling manifested against the other side [the police]'.³⁸ Indeed, according to the *Examiner*:

the indignation of the entire community was now fairly roused and the sixpences of the poorest joined with the guineas of the rich in attesting the unmistakable unanimity of feeling with which this oppressive supplementary proceeding was regarded.³⁹

The public protest that took place on the next day (the 1st of July) when the boys were due in court was strikingly high-profile. 'The boys walked down to Huddersfield, two and two together, like scholars at a school-feast, accompanied by their mothers, and a host of other women'.⁴⁰ For just over an hour, this procession of women, not simply accompanying but protecting their children, made its way from Honley along one of the main roads into Huddersfield through 'crowds of sympathising friends and relatives'.⁴¹ Once again the magistrates decided not to proceed with the charges; once again the people of Honley celebrated. A large crowd, estimated to be in excess of 3,000, turned out, and in a prominent position was Johnny Moss, on his mule, which had been renamed Antrobus for the occasion! A local band, from nearby Berry Brow, played 'Oh dear, what can the matter be' (and other unnamed 'lively airs') as the 'monster procession' made its way, 'most peaceable and orderly', through the village. There was a 'thrill of joy through the neighbourhood ... [and] demonstrations of joy and welcome'.⁴² The celebrations ended at the village cricket ground, where, after some short speeches, there were 'three hearty cheers for Roberts the Defence Advocate and the [Honley] Defence Committee', followed by 'three times three cheers' for Princess Alice's marriage, which had taken place that day. 'Finally the whole of the large crowd sang the national anthem in good tune and with a violence that made the

valley ring again.⁴³ Significantly, ‘the additional police force in the town [Honley] did not interfere at all, but wisely let the villagers have their frolic out in their own way’. It was a decision that eased tensions to such an extent that even the police were treated with ‘due civility’ and it also ‘showed that Honley people can be quiet and peaceable when they are let alone’.⁴⁴ Reflecting on events, the *Chronicle* expressed its regret that ‘some policemen do not act more in accordance with their general instructions, which are that “constables must be particularly cautious not to interfere idly or unnecessarily”’.⁴⁵ The *Examiner*, generally more critical of the police, took a similar position. It conceded that it would be ‘ungenerous to overlook in any degree the onerous nature of a policeman’s duties and the unpopularity which, in certain quarters their faithful discharge will almost necessarily entail’ but was concerned with improper restrictions on personal liberty, arguing that ‘the only guarantee for the legitimate use of [police power] is to be found in the possession of good nature, intelligence and common sense’. Sadly, it concluded, ‘nothing seems clearer than the injudicious exercise of this, some discretionary power by the police of Honley’.⁴⁶

This was not the end of the saga. A week later there was a well-attended meeting at Honley town hall at which it was decided to send a memorial to the Chief Constable of the WRCC, condemning, in general ‘the irritating and insulting conduct of police’ and specifically the ‘indiscreet and injudicious, if not illegal conduct’ of PC Antrobus. It warned that it was

our strong opinion that the people of this village have in many cases been most improperly interfered with and that too, in spirit and conduct much more likely to irritate and provoke than to allay and soothe unpleasant feelings towards those who are put over us as guardians of the peace.⁴⁷

and concluded that ‘the peace of the district [of Honley] cannot be maintained because of the bitterness of the feeling which is entertained against [PC Antrobus] by the villagers’.⁴⁸ However, the signatories, described as ‘133 manufacturers, merchants, solicitors, tradesmen, &c’, made it clear that it was the actions of the police generally, not just Antrobus alone, that was cause for concern. In saying this, they were not suggesting that the police should be removed but rather that the force should act properly.

If the police of this district will thus try to discharge the duties imposed upon them, they will have the regard and support of all respectable men; but if they transgress proper limits and encroach upon the liberties and privileges of the people, all the prosecutions which may be threatened, cannot prevent that which we fear and deprecate – disorder, riot and crime.⁴⁹

There could be no clearer statement of the desire for a properly policed society, in which laws were upheld but liberties protected. The memorial concluded with a specific request that Antrobus be removed. Cobbe, who had also received a letter from Antrobus asking to be moved, agreed and a new constable took his place. There was no trouble at that year's Honley Feast and the greatest disturbance in the village was caused by a tornado that hit in October.⁵⁰ An unpopular policeman had been run out of town but there was no rejection of the police *per se*. Honley was never an unpoliced village but when PC Grant was installed a new working relationship had to be established – and one which reflected the villagers' sense of the legitimate limits of police action. Grant, although not a local man – he had been born in Devon – was an experienced officer, who soon won the support of many of the people in Honley. The number of prosecutions, especially for minor offences, dropped dramatically and such was his success that he was promoted to first-class constable in April 1863 and sergeant in May 1864, at which point he moved to Kirkburton, where he served out the remaining fifteen years of his career. On his retirement he was described as a 'much respected sergeant of police' who had 'gained the just esteem of everybody' including 'the class with whom policemen chiefly come in contact'.⁵¹ Although such a judgement needs to be viewed sceptically, there is clear evidence that Grant was successful in building bridges with local communities.

There was one final twist in the Honley saga, which reflected positively on Grant but also suggested that senior policemen had not properly learnt the lessons of the previous months. In the summer of 1863 the defence committee held its last meeting, a supper 'celebrating the popular triumph over a meddling and over-officious policeman' at the *Allied Tavern*. The supper would not have taken place had the senior police officers, Colonel Cobbe and Superintendent Heaton, not 'disapproved' of the defence committee's proposal to present '£2 to Police-constable Grant ... who had

gained the respect and confidence of the inhabitants by his excellent conduct as a police officer'.⁵² No reason was given for the refusal but the proposal, as well as the overt praise for Grant, was implicitly a criticism of Cobbe's decision to transfer Antrobus to Honley and Heaton's defence of him as 'a model officer'. Undoubtedly Honley after the summer of 1862 was much quieter. Far fewer cases were brought before the local magistrates, though press reporting of foot races and the like suggest no significant change in local behaviour. However, it was noted in the local press that there had been 'a very great change ... in the public mind at Honley with regard to the police'. Unlike Antrobus, the new constable, Grant, was reported to have won 'entire approval'.⁵³ It is unlikely that village mores had changed dramatically. The police had learned to use their discretion in the implementation of the law rather than pushing it to the limit as had been the case with Antrobus.

Almost simultaneously, widespread public discontent with the new county police was showing itself, albeit in a significantly different form, in the nearby village of Holmfirth where there was 'considerable dissatisfaction ... with the manner in which the [new county] police have interfered with the peaceable inhabitants' which 'rendered themselves obnoxious to many'.⁵⁴ Protest in Honley had been driven from the bottom up. The sense of injustice in the village created a cross-class sense of unity but middle-class involvement followed rather than led events. In contrast, in Holmfirth protest was coordinated by members of the middle classes, who took the initiative in calling a public protest meeting for Monday the 7th of June, 1862. Headed by the Rev. T James, twenty or more of the respectable male population of Holmfirth demanded a meeting to consider what action should be taken in light of 'the glaring encroachments of the police upon the rights and liberties of the peaceable inhabitants of these places'.⁵⁵ The roots of the problem went back to the introduction of the new county force. Unlike in Honley, in Holmfirth the new police, from the outset, had been 'very diligent', particularly in enforcing licensing laws and prosecuting cockfighting. In the summer of 1858 there were reports of 'dastardly attacks on the police-constables of the neighbourhood'.⁵⁶ However, police zeal was tempered to a significant degree by the attitude of the highly-regarded Inspector Haworth. His departure, in late 1859, removed an important force for conciliation between the police and respectable Holmfirth folk. At a special meeting he had been given

a hearty vote of thanks and speakers praised the fact that 'his object ... [was] to carry out the law rather than to impose fines ... [and he] had frequently cautioned disturbers of the peace instead of taking them before the magistrates'. In particular, he was praised for being 'free from the overbearance and officiousness to which some officers are too prone'.⁵⁷ In the absence of his restraining presence matters began to worsen, with the conduct of certain constables being described as an 'intolerable nuisance'.⁵⁸ There was also a growing suspicion that the local magistrates were too willing to accept police evidence, so much so that 'gentlemen ... having heard the cases, say the decisions are against evidence'.⁵⁹

The situation deteriorated rapidly in the late-1860s and 1861. Once again the attitude of individual officers was critical. One of the most assiduous men was Joseph Briers, who had been moved to Holmfirth, having been demoted from sergeant as the result of unspecified indiscipline. Briers was a high-profile and unpopular man. In February 1861 he was viciously beaten by a gang of seven men after he had (at the request of the landlord) cleared the *Rose and Crown*. Their trial caused 'considerable excitement in the district' and, though found guilty and fined £6 and costs each, the money was paid immediately.⁶⁰ Even more interest was aroused by the subsequent trial of Briers for perjury. Much depended on the notes taken by the local reporter, John Sanderson. The case was dismissed but this was 'evidently distasteful to the crowded court who manifested their dissatisfaction by their muted execrations'.⁶¹ Three months later he was transferred out of the village but much damage had been done to police/public relations. Briers was not alone. The names of two other men appear time and again in the local press: PCs Linas Hancock and John Strange. Both men were outsiders – coincidentally both born in Gloucestershire – and both were later moved out of Holmfirth and subsequently dismissed. Their careers throw light on the difficulty faced by Cobbe and Heaton in recruiting good men. Hancock was serving his second term in the WRCC and never progressed beyond the third class; Strange was marginally more successful, though was demoted to the second class before being moved out of the district.

Matters in Holmfirth finally came to a head in 1862. Working men had borne the brunt of police zeal initially. After two sessions in which there had been no business for the magistrates, their session of May 1862 saw a sharp increase, mainly as the result of 'trivial' cases

brought by the police, mainly for allegedly drunk and disorderly behaviour.⁶² Within a few weeks the situation had deteriorated dramatically. The *Chronicle* editorialized about the need for the Holmfirth magistrates to consider other testimony, especially when police evidence was unsupported. Only in this way could 'a proper respect for authority' be restored.⁶³ Under the heading 'Frivolous Police Charges And Their Results', a correspondent detailed cases of men being charged with obstruction when making their way home or even standing on private property which gave rise to 'strong feelings against the police'. The case of Joseph Balmforth, a painter, epitomised the problem. He was charged with 'obstructing the road' as he made his way to his front door, through a crowd of people, including a police officer. The officer testified that Balmforth had taken him by the shoulder and deliberately caused an obstruction and, in the absence of any other witness in court, the magistrate, emphasising the fact that the police evidence was on oath, fined him 1s (5p) and costs.⁶⁴ Whereas once animosity towards the police had been confined largely to 'rougher' elements by the summer of 1862 anti-police anger 'now pervades every class in the community'. The nature of many of the cases brought before the local magistrates, the suspicion that a number of police cases were 'imagined or manufactured', and the willingness of the magistrates to accept uncorroborated police evidence united local sentiment against 'a persecuting force'.⁶⁵

This was the context in which the meeting demanded by Rev. James took place. The organizers seriously underestimated the number of people who wished to attend. As the time for the start of the meeting approached,

the road in front of the [Town] Hall was thronged with countless wearers of blue smocks, the hard working and aggrieved portion of the community who have especially been the subject of the harsh treatment of which they complain ... The thousands of people who had assembled consequently wended their way to [the cricket ground] to prevent obstruction of the road.⁶⁶

The mass meeting was chaired by the chief constable of the graveship of Holme and the township of Netherthong but the initiative was taken by middle-class men who dominated the speech-making. The very visible presence of these middle-class figures, equally aggrieved at police high-handedness, helped direct local anger into

the more respectable form of protest of petitioning the authorities. Nonetheless, there was real anger, not least at the stance of the chief constable who had written to the Rev. James claiming, not only that he had received no complaints, but that the police had acquitted themselves well. The first claim was denied by some of those present and the second dismissed as 'bosh and nonsense'.⁶⁷ There was further anger with the manner in which the village's grievance had been investigated. Cobbe simply asked the relevant Superintendent, Heaton, to look into matters and he, only interviewing the police involved and, totally ignoring the petitioners, had concluded that nothing was amiss.⁶⁸

Two resolutions were put before the meeting and both were passed unanimously and accompanied by 'triumphant cheers' before being sent to both the Chief Constable and the Lord Lieutenant of the county. The first was proposed by Alfred Wood, a mill-owner, and seconded by the woollen manufacturer, James Holmes; the second proposed by a local shopkeeper, John Sanderson was seconded by James Schofield, a draper. The first resolution made clear the prevailing mood.

[T]his meeting has viewed with feelings of intense disgust, the conduct of the police in this district; that the paltry and trivial cases which have been brought before the bench of magistrates at Holmfirth and the mode in which these cases have been dealt with have greatly excited universal indignation amongst the inhabitants of this neighbourhood.⁶⁹

Wood spoke forcefully of the 'petty tyranny which has for some time past been exercised by the police towards the different classes of the community' and bemoaned the fact that 'in Holmfirth the police were not their servants; they were their tyrants'.⁷⁰ He was not alone in expressing such sentiments. The speeches were dominated by a rhetoric that stressed the liberties of the English, and their constitutional rights and references were made to the threat posed by the new county police which would reduce the people of Holmfirth to the level of 'the crawling serfs of a Russian or an Austrian despot'.⁷¹ At the same time there were very specific criticisms made of the county police. Despite the cost of maintaining a force, it was seen to fail in its basic responsibility of protecting property and person. Wood damned the police for their incompetence in dealing with the robbery from his mill and for their insulting behaviour

to respectable men of the town.⁷² There was also sympathy for less respectable victims of police action.

Notoriously too many of them [the police] now levy a species of black mark upon the doubtful persons who frequent the streets at night; often they extract fees from the 'unfortunates' [prostitutes] in their beat not to molest them in their vocation.⁷³

Specific police practices, notably the humiliation of being handcuffed in public and of being moved on for no good reason, were also highlighted. Yet more serious accusations were made. Several speakers complained that the police effectively manufactured cases and gave false evidence even when under oath; only for the local magistrates to accept the uncorroborated evidence of the police, even in the face of contrary evidence from 'respectable' witnesses.

The 'policeman's meddling-malady' was a common complaint. One speaker, the weaver Benjamin Stanley, waxed eloquent on the 'petty tyranny and pomposity' of the police, and the paltriness of the cases that they brought. He cited a number of cases including one from his own experience when he and his wife

happened to take the daring liberty of looking over the battlements [of Victoria Bridge in the centre of Holmfirth] at the water, when up came a man with very bright buttons and a very blue coat, and who, with that kind of mock dignity which I suppose he had borrowed or stolen from his superiors, ordered us to 'move on'⁷⁴

They didn't and felt the full force of the law. He concluded his speech with a rhetorical question.

What species of tyranny can be so hateful as that which presents its ugly face at the corner of every street, pokes its nose into the privacy of dwellings, domineering with low-bred surliness on every public occasion, and is borne with and upholden by the 'powers that be' [the magistrates] in spite of the testimony of most respectable witnesses?⁷⁵

There was an element of social snobbery from middle-class men who resented being told what to do by men who were their social inferiors and 'comers-in'. However, it was clear from both the size and the response of the crowd that these criticisms struck a chord among 'the wearers of blue smocks' as well.⁷⁶

There was further anger at the suggestion that there was a conspiracy against the police. As Holmes made clear that ‘it is not that we want to do away with the police’ but rather fewer and better policemen. Like Wood, he stressed ‘the dictatorial and officious actions of the police’ and quoted Roberts’s claim at the recent trial of the Honley rioters that the police waged a war against the poor. The situation was not helped by the fact that the new policeman was ‘a low-bred stranger with whose antecedents we have no acquaintance’ and who acted in a manner that had more in common with ‘John Moss’s mule’.⁷⁷ To compound matters further, and quoting a recently retired policeman, Holmes argued that the police were told from the very top (Superintendent Heaton) not to be friendly with members of the local community. Despite the undoubted anger on display, the calls for moderation prevailed and, after the second resolution had been passed to resounding cheers, the crowd gave a further three cheers for the Queen and then dispersed quietly – but there was to be one final twist to the events of the day.

Superintendent Heaton had been aware that a mass meeting was scheduled to take place in Holmfirth and that local feelings were running high. By way of precaution, and not wishing for a repeat of the scenes in Honley, he arranged for thirty-six men, from three divisions of the West Riding, to be present under his leadership. Entraining from Huddersfield, they duly arrived in Holmfirth to be greeted more with mirth than anger. The ‘most peaceable and orderly’ conduct of the meeting (and its aftermath) was beyond reproach and the police had nothing to do and no-one to arrest. However, as a local eye witness (described as ‘a gentleman in whose truthfulness we have entire confidence’) told the *Examiner*, the police ‘determined to make the best of the unfortunate occurrence by kicking up a shindy of their own’. Presumably in the absence of Heaton (though there is no mention of his whereabouts), fifteen or so drunken policemen ‘sallied forth into the town and neighbourhood and ... suffered their usual surly dignity to melt down into swearing, leap frog and other antics much to the amusement of those who saw them’. Having spent much of the early morning of Tuesday drinking copiously in the *Rose & Crown*, Holmfirth, four or five policemen then ‘perambulated the road from the end of Victoria Street to Upper Mill, rousing many of the peaceable inhabitants from their slumbers at 4 a.m. Two were seen ‘performing the donkey’s part between the shafts of a cart’ while ‘oaths and various kinds of ribaldry’ were heard

as the police roamed through Upper Mill. Perhaps the most amazing aspect of this drunken spree is that it was eleven-and-a-half miles from Holmfirth to Upper Mill.⁷⁸ Matters could scarcely get worse for the reputation of the police – but they did. On the following day,

[o]n the platform at the Holmfirth station and during their ride to Huddersfield, they [the police] cheered themselves and others, by lustily singing ‘Here’s to the red, white and blue’, emphasizing strongly the last word, and adding to it occasionally the word *Antrobus*.⁷⁹

Cobbe’s response to the Holmfirth resolutions was not reported in the local press but it is striking that by the end of August no cases had been brought by the police before the local magistrates.⁸⁰ There were also changes in police personnel in Holmfirth and whereas ‘the last police acted on the system that if there was not a squabble in the street they would make one’ but now there were no police cases – a change that was ‘much the better’.⁸¹ As in Honley, so in Holmfirth a *modus vivendi* was established through the restriction of police activities.

Standing back from the detail of the two disturbances, a number of broader questions and conclusions emerge. The first question centres on the typicality of Honley and Holmfirth. Both had traditions of liberal and radical politics, though both (Honley in particular) prided themselves on being law-abiding. There were undoubtedly ‘rougher’ communities to be found in Upper Agbrigg but by virtue of the trouble that erupted in these villages, they were unusual. There were differences between the two outbursts of anti-police sentiment but they were essentially one of degree, and the active involvement of middle-class critics of the police in both towns was significant. More generally, there was an ongoing, grumbling hostility that manifested itself in smaller scale attacks on the police in various parts of the area. During the trial of the ringleaders of the Honley riot, the prosecutor, Mr Learoyd, drew attention to how the ‘revolt against the authority and control of the police ... had pervaded to an alarming extent some of the places surrounding this and neighbouring towns’.⁸² This might be dismissed as courtroom hyperbole but the evidence suggests that there was a real problem for the new county police in some areas. The pages of the Huddersfield newspapers bear witness to continuing animosity towards the police, particularly in Lindley, Kirkheaton and Scammonden.⁸³ Furthermore, it was a problem that

continued into the following decade. In 1873, Heaton conceded that there were places, such as Skelmanthorpe ‘where the police were interfered with in the execution of their duty’.⁸⁴ In the autumn of the previous year the inhabitants of another nearby West Riding village, Emley, celebrated the departure of an unpopular constable in spectacular fashion. PC Suttle, a teetotaler, had made himself very unpopular during the two years that he spent there. His departure sparked a rousing send-off. Angry villagers in Honley had burnt an unpopular policeman in effigy; their counterparts in Emley indulged in a spectacular form of ‘rough music’ to express their disapproval.

The local band was engaged, an irregular procession formed and a crowd of persons marched through the village. One man carried a beer-barrel on his back, another carried a loaf of bread, held aloft on a hay fork. A third carried a ham on his head, while others for want of better things, tied their handkerchiefs to the end of sticks and held them up to flutter in the breeze ... beer was plentiful ... and great was the rejoicing.⁸⁵

PC Suttle could not escape unnoticed.

As the policeman essayed to depart [members of the crowd] brayed discordant noises in his ears and in those of the horse drawing the cart full of goods, and not content with that, and with shouting uncomplimentary and coarse epithets, they stoned, jostled and knocked him down and otherwise insulted him.⁸⁶

Such public shows of communal disapproval drew strength from traditions, firmly rooted in a pre-industrial, largely rural past, but still seen as relevant in an industrial and increasingly urban present. As Roberts had pointed out in the trial of the Honley rioters, ‘the law might be in favour of the goaders [but] a goaded people [will] find means of showing their contempt for those who use the law with cruelty’.⁸⁷ PC Antrobus was not the only person to be burnt in effigy, nor was PC Suttle alone in being subjected to ‘rough music’ in the West Riding in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.⁸⁸

Putting aside various industrial disputes in different parts of the country that gave rise to major anti-police disturbances, there are indicators that the problems experienced in the West Riding were to be found elsewhere. For example, in Hull popular concern with wrongful arrests and police brutality led to a major anti-police disturbance in January 1870 in Raywell Street, which itself gave rise

of a police enquiry that revealed a ‘tendency to over-authority, or an impatience of restraint ... [and] apparent vindictiveness’ that is reminiscent particularly of the complaints from Holmfirth.⁸⁹ Echoes of the events in Honley were to be found further afield, for example in the demonstration in the Essex village of Stebbing in 1888 when the inhabitants celebrated Guy Fawkes’ day

by making an effigy of a gentleman in Her Majesty’s employment who has rendered himself unpopular by doing his duty. The effigy of Pc Enoch Raison was borne through the village in the afternoon and again at night in a torchlight procession before being hanged and burned at Bran End.⁹⁰

Raison (and his family) was driven out of the village and almost immediately resigned from the Essex county force. In the absence of systematic research into the subject, it would be foolish to generalize from a small number of examples but the scattered evidence does suggest that the popular response to the ‘new police’ in the West Riding was not unique.

The third major question centres on the typicality of men such as Antrobus. The magistrates at the trial of the Honley rioters certainly suggested that ‘there might be three or four men ... that might bring the whole [force] into disrepute’.⁹¹ There can be no doubt that PC Antrobus was highly unpopular. He was variously described as ‘peculiarly obnoxious’ and ‘officious and overbearing’ and some contemporary commentators focused on the *ad hominem* anger manifest in Honley but, as at least one writer pointed out, the riot was a ‘fire [that] only wanted igniting’ and Antrobus was the spark. In other words, there was a ‘dislike of the police generally’ as well as animosity towards Antrobus that came to a head on that Monday in June 1862.⁹² Few, if any, officers had a record of indiscipline to compare with his. Having been found guilty of assault on more than one occasion and having been twice dismissed from police forces before he joined the West Riding constabulary, he was hardly a typical policeman. He was also extremely zealous in his work while at Honley. However, if his past record (about which he kept quiet) was unusual, his approach to police work was less so. Indeed, as became clear at the Honley trial, he was closely connected with Superintendent Heaton. Antrobus, of whom Heaton spoke in positive terms as a ‘model officer’, had a prosecution rate was undoubtedly above average but it would be misleading to see

him as wholly untypical. He was not alone. The evidence from Holmfirth points in the same direction. Although not as officious as PC Antrobus, PCs Briers, Hancock, Strange and Taylor, as well as the newly-appointed Inspector Parkin, showed a degree of zeal in prosecuting landlords and their clients that brought them into conflict (sometimes literally) with some inhabitants of Holmfirth.⁹³ Elsewhere, there were many ordinary men and women who would have recognised Roberts's claim, made when defending the Honley rioters that some members of the police showed 'servility to the rich' and 'cruelty to the working classes'.⁹⁴ However, as the evidence in chapter eight demonstrated, there were also other officers whose actions were less antagonistic.

The final question relates to the notion of policing by consent, which will be discussed more fully in the final chapter. Suffice it to say here that the Honley riot and the Holmfirth mass protest of 1862 revealed a scale of ongoing mistrust, which could rapidly turn to outright opposition, which had been played down by defenders of the 'new' police. More importantly, these events highlight the very real limitations of police power and authority and the need for the police to accommodate themselves to their community, rather than simply imposing their authority.

Endnotes

- 1 *Report of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary, 1861–2, Parliamentary Papers* 1863 (20), p.74. Much of this chapter is based on D Taylor, 'Protest and Consent in the Policing of the Wild West Riding of Yorkshire, c.1850–1875: The Police v the People, Northern History', II (2), 2014, pp.290–310.
- 2 *HEX*, 12 July 1862.
- 3 See for example, *Daily News*, 26 June 1862. On the same page as a lengthy report on a major fracture of the Fleet sewer that threatened underground railway works in London there was reference to 'a most disgraceful riot ... at a village near Huddersfield'.
- 4 *West Riding Police Records*, Examination Book D, 1858–61, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk, 30 August 2015. Antrobus also lied about his previous police disciplinary record. It is impossible to say how many other men gave false information to the police authorities.
- 5 *HC*, 6 April 1861.
- 6 *HC*, 19 October & 28 December 1861.
- 7 *HC*, 25 January 1862.
- 8 *HC*, 5 & 19 October 1861, 25 January, 3 May 1862. For other reported cases see *HC*, 28 December 1861, 10 May, 14 June 1862.
- 9 Concern with obstruction was nothing new but, as the General Orders for the Metropolitan Police clearly demonstrate, senior police officers were

acutely aware of the need for sensitivity in enforcing the relevant laws. Likewise, moving on had emerged as (from a police perspective) a sensible tactic to prevent large groups assembling but again required the careful use of discretion to avoid being counter-productive.

10 *HC*, 5 July 1862.

11 *HEX*, 5 July 1862.

12 *HEX*, 28 June 1862.

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*

15 *LM*, 30 June 1862.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *LM*, 28 June 1862.

18 *LM*, 2 July 1862.

19 For details of Roberts's varied career see R. Challinor, *A Radical Lawyer in Victorian England: W. P. Roberts and the Struggle for Workers' Rights*, Farnham, Tauris (1990). Although discussing police action on a number of occasions, C. Frank, *Master and Servant Law: Chartists, Trade Unions, Radical Lawyers and the Magistracy in England, 1840–1865*, Farnham, Tauris, 2010 has a more specific focus.

20 *HC*, 24 March 1860. See also *HC*, 16 November 1850, 15 August 1857 for examples of Roberts defending workmen charged with embezzling woollen waste under the Worsted Acts.

21 *HC*, 14 May 1853. The case involved a beerseller who had been charged with having disorderly people on his premises. The 'plague of blue locusts' quotation is cited in Challinor, *Radical Lawyer*, p.81.

22 *HC*, 11 May 1850, 12 April 1851. The Holmfirth case provides a very good example of Heaton's pedantic determination to enforce laws that might restrict licensing hours. In this case the debate centred on whether Holmfirth existed 'under the construction of the words of 15th section of 3 & 4 Victoria'. The local magistrates refused to adjudicate on the matter and recommended that Heaton apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for a definitive ruling.

23 Of the remaining ten, three cannot be traced at all and seven cannot be unequivocally identified. For example, there were five George Boothroyds in the village. Two were aged forty-one, married and woollen weavers; two were aged thirty-one, married and woollen weavers; and one was a fifteen-year-old mule piecer.

24 *LM*, 2 July 1862.

25 *LM*, 30 June 1862.

26 *LM*, 5 July 1862.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *HC*, 5 July 1862. It was alleged that the fines amounted to more than £100.

29 *LM*, 30 June 1862. The reference to public opinion is in *HEX*, 5 July 1862.

30 *LM*, 30 June 1862.

31 *HEX*, 5 July 1862.

32 *HEX*, 28 June 1862.

33 *HEX*, 5 July 1862.

34 *LM*, 2 July 1862.

- 35 *Ibid.* Italics added.
- 36 *HC*, 5 July 1862.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *HEX*, 28 June 1862.
- 40 *HC*, 5 July 1862.
- 41 *HEX*, 5 July 1862.
- 42 *HEX*, 28 June 1862.
- 43 *HEX*, 5 July 1862.
- 44 *HC*, 5 July 1862 and *HEX*, 5 July 1862.
- 45 *HC*, 5 July 1862.
- 46 *HEX*, 28 June 1862. The paper also criticised the Holmfirth police for the same failings.
- 47 *HC*, 12 July 1862.
- 48 *HEX*, 12 July 1862.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *HC*, 25 October 1862.
- 51 *HC*, 15 March 1879.
- 52 *HEX*, 29 August 1863. The sum was the difference between the £41 subscribed for the defence of the Honley rioters and the £39 than had actually been spent.
- 53 *HC*, 28 May 1864. Grant may have been helped by the sudden and unfortunate death of his thirteen-year old son in the December of 1862. Antrobus later confessed to having been dismissed from two police forces before joining the West Riding constabulary and having been convicted for assault on more than one occasion, though he had lied about this to gain re-employment as a police officer. *LM*, 22 Oct. 1863.
- 54 *HEX*, 5 July 1862.
- 55 *HEX*, 12 July 1862.
- 56 *HC*, 5 June 1858. See also 1 December, 1858, 24 December 1859 & 1 September 1860.
- 57 *HC*, 5 November 1859.
- 58 *HC*, 1 October 1859.
- 59 *HC*, 1 September 1860. The paper concluded that 'these cases are almost becoming a nuisance'. The actions of the Holmfirth magistrates contrasted with those of their counterparts in Huddersfield, where most of the Honley cases were heard, who were more sceptical of the police and openly criticized them on occasion.
- 60 *HEX*, 9 March 1861.
- 61 *HEX*, 16 March 1861.
- 62 *LM*, 5 May 1862. The reasons for this upsurge in police activities are not given.
- 63 *HC*, 21 June 1862.
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 *HC*, 17 August 1861 & 21 June 1862.
- 66 *HC*, 12 July 1862.
- 67 *LM*, 10 July 1862 & *HC*, 12 July 1862.
- 68 *HEX*, 12 July 1862.

- 69 *HC*, 12 July 1862.
- 70 *HEx*, 12 July 1862.
- 71 *HC*, 12 July 1862.
- 72 Wood claimed that he had informed the police of the likely perpetrators (seen spending freely in town) but that they had failed to prevent the robbers from leaving with the stolen goods from Holmfirth and nearby Brockholes railway stations. *HC*, 12 July 1862.
- 73 *Ibid.*
- 74 *Ibid.*
- 75 *Ibid.*
- 76 The unity of sentiment in 1862 contrasts with the hostility between Chartists and Anti-Corn Law Leaguers in Holmfirth in the 1840s.
- 77 *HC*, 12 July 1862.
- 78 *HEx*, 12 July 1862.
- 79 *Ibid.*
- 80 *HC*, 30 August 1862.
- 81 *HC*, 28 March 1863.
- 82 *HC*, 5 July 1862.
- 83 Responsibility for the policing of Lindley switched to the Huddersfield borough force following incorporation of the town in 1868.
- 84 *HC*, 12 July 1873. Heaton appears to have overstated his case. There were some disturbances involving navvies, briefly staying in the village, but local press coverage reveals far fewer anti-police incidents than in places such as Scammonden or Kirkheaton. Conflict between miners and colliers, on the one hand, and the police on the other, was reported on numerous occasions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. See for example *HC*, 16 May 1879, 1 & 5 June 1880, 18 October 1888, 20 January 1894.
- 85 *LM*, 2 October 1872.
- 86 *Ibid.* The following year saw the inhabitants of Ossett complaining that ‘instead of being a protection to the people they [the police] were positively a terror’; so much so that ‘the feeling ... is so strong that the police have been turned out of their lodgings and ... compelled to live in the police cells’ in the town. *LM*, 31 December 1873.
- 87 *HC*, 5 July 1862.
- 88 For local examples of burning in effigy see *HC*, 24 November 1860, 20 June 1863, 1 July 1865, 19 June 1869, 22 June 1872, 30 June 1874, 22 October 1879, & 21 August 1890. For examples of rough music see *HC*, 20 June 1863, 2 July 1864, 1 July and 23 September 1865, 1 September 1866, 30 March 1867, 6 April 1878, 26 August 1884, 23 June 1890; *LM*, 16 February 1863, 12 June 1866, 22 August 1866, 21 December 1866, 30 June 1874, & 17 October 1893. The custom was undoubtedly less common by the end of the century and the *Leeds Mercury*, not entirely accurately, consigned ‘stang-riding’, as it was often termed, to the category of bygone punishments in the 1880s. See for example 2 February 1884.
- 89 *Hull Packet*, 11 March 1870.
- 90 *Essex Weekly News*, 9 November 1888 cited in M. Scolan, *Sworn to Serve: Police in Essex, 1840–1990*, Chichester, Phillimore, 1993, p.43.
- 91 *HEx*, 5 July 1862.

- 92 *HC*, 28 June 1862.
- 93 See for example *HC*, 27 June, 12 September 1857, 12 & 30 October, 13 November 1858, 8 January, 2 April 1859, 21 July, 4 & 18 August, 27 October, 10 & 24 November, 8 December 1860, 9 February, 25 May, 22 June, 17 August, 28 September & 26 October 1861.
- 94 *LM*, 30 June 1862.